

Love is
a time of enchantment:
in it all days are fair and all fields
green. Youth is blest by it,
old age made benign:
the eyes of love see
roses blooming in December,
and sunshine through rain. Verily
is the time of true-love
a time of enchantment — and
Oh! how eager is woman
to be bewitched!

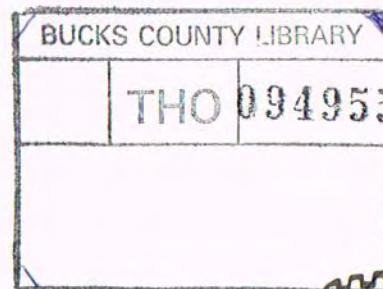
THE SOUTH HORIZON MAN

Whilst in London, Eleanor Seaton and Sarah Raeburn, two sisters from New Zealand, meet Georgina Innes, who works in the genealogical section of a tourist firm. When they invite Georgina to return with them to their remote sheep station to write up their family history, she jumps at the chance. In New Zealand, Georgina sifts through the family's papers and is amazed to discover that she is related to them. However, she is reluctant to reveal this information — and especially to Seth Oliphant, the sisters' handsome nephew.

ESSIE SUMMERS

THE SOUTH
HORIZON MAN

Complete and Unabridged



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To the memory of the grandfather
I was never lucky enough to know,
William Summers of the Isle of Wight
(right next to Osborne House) who
was the same age as the future Edward
the Seventh.

Also to another Edwardian bride, as
in this story, who married William's
second son, in Newcastle-upon-Tyne
and brought her to New Zealand, my
mother.

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ONCE the crossing from the Isle of Wight was over Georgina had the feeling, ridiculous though it seemed, of having crossed her Rubicon. Why she had been so tense about it she didn't know. She needn't feel guilty. It wasn't as if she had promised to marry Ward. She had taken fright at actually committing herself despite the enchantment of the previous weeks. Inexplicably, she had heard her own voice asking for time to consider it.

Angry at first, and hurt, since then Ward had been maddeningly confident he'd be able to get her to consent. Now she was going to compromise. She'd tell him she was off on a three months trip to New Zealand, with these two women he'd brought down to her from the London office, so how about marking time till then? She'd be fair, tell him if he had changed his mind by then, it would be all right by her. After all, three

months ago they hadn't even known each other.

The sea-breeze lifted a strand of her coppery hair as she walked along the Southampton street, salt-tanged and adventurous, and her spirits lifted. Eleanor Seaton and Sarah Raeburn would be here next week and she would be able to tell them she would go with them to that remote sheep-station to write up their family history and they need never know it would be her family history too. Unless of course she found that revelation would be welcome to them.

What a good thing Ward was having this unexpected trip to Southampton. They could discuss it over dinner here perhaps. He was on his way back from Bristol. She didn't know why the men from Head Office were meeting him here unless it concerned this branch. Georgina was only a part-timer for the genealogical section of this tourist firm so she wasn't likely to have heard any rumours.

That was how she had met Eleanor and Sarah. Ward had requested her to help them trace a very vague link of their early family connections before he

sent them off on their month's tour of Europe. She relived that strange moment when she had first realized they were trying to trace a forebear of hers, her great-grandmother.

She could hear them now, with eager-eyed zest, Sarah: "She's not a relation by blood but for a short time at the beginning of the century she was a member of our family, a family who treated her very badly. One member of it, anyway, her husband's mother, who owned the estate or at least ran it till her son, George, was old enough. Our own mother, a child of twelve, lived there too, and loved Ellen dearly. Mother was quite devastated when George was killed, and a few weeks later, Ellen fled back to the Isle of Wight. George had met her there when he accompanied a very old lady paying a final visit to the island of her birth. He brought her back as a bride. But his mother treated her abominably."

Just as well Eleanor had chimed in then because Georgina's head was whirling. "It was very remote, you see. Very aptly called South Horizon. It's on a lake-shore

with the only access by water." (Georgina could have told them that). "She was there quite a few years and the two of them were very happy together except that no children appeared and that Hannah absolutely hated Ellen. Then, tragically, he had this fatal accident, and shortly, when Hannah had to go to Queenstown on business Ellen got the chance of leaving on a neighbour's boat. If you could say neighbour. The Campions lived in another bay and had called in to find out how Ellen was faring, having for long enough known the situation. Hannah's enmity, heightened by natural grief, had reached a fever-pitch that terrified Ellen. She took a few possessions, leaving a note saying she knew she had never been welcome so was going back home. How desolate Ellen must've felt on that long sea-voyage back, possibly dreading that her own people might not approve. The voyage out, with George, had been pure delight. She was a wonderful story-teller, as our mother knew."

Sarah took up the tale. "We've always had a yen to know what happened to her. We've very little to go on, just her maiden

name. I suppose she took her marriage lines with her. We don't even know what part of the island she came from, but hope that in so small a place, someone might give us a clue. We told Mr. Ward Selham we'd like to set inquiries going before our trip to the continent. It seemed incredibly lucky when he said he knew the very person, his girl-friend, who lived here and worked part-time in a special department that gave this service. He added you were a free-lance secretary who had written family histories for a couple of clients. Have you any chance of finding out what happened to Ellen? Perhaps it's hopelessly sentimental but for our mother's sake we'd like to put flowers on her grave. You might think it rather silly but — ”

Georgina had found her voice. "Not at all. I find it endearing. It's not an impossible task. Best left till you get back when I ought to have come up with something. I'm going to propose an idea. My parents are in South America at the moment . . . Dad's a consultant engineer, and my brother, who has just graduated, is with them this time. So I'm rattling

round in quite a large house. What say you leave your bulk luggage with me and come back after Europe? That will give me time to find out all there is to know. You can stay with me for a few nights then. In fact if you've got the time you could spend a couple of nights now."

She knew that already she had more knowledge than they would have but she wanted to get to know these two women. They were overwhelmed, as well they might be, but had accepted graciously. During those two days Georgina had gleaned a lot, and for sure Ellen hadn't exaggerated the treatment she had had from Hannah. No wonder that Ellen, carrying within her the seed of George's child, had stolen away from South Horizon, determined that if she bore a son he should not have to grow up under Hannah's dominance, perhaps become warped in turn by her bitterness and incredible meanness. But she had had a daughter and in the fullness of time had known a second chance of happiness.

Georgina hadn't known how she'd managed not to reveal this at once. Perhaps because she seemed to grasp

quickly she needed to know who had inherited the estate, situated on Moanakotare which simply meant the Lake of the Kingfisher. Perhaps too it was an inborn sense of loyalty to the great-grandmother she only dimly remembered, but more probably to Cluny, George and Ellen's darling daughter. What a good job dear Cluny, her grandmother, was visiting her half-sister in Florida just now. Cluny was nearly eighty. Better to find out more before telling her.

Sarah and Eleanor questioned her about the family histories she'd written for Marius Salvatore in Naples, and for Miss de Carteret here. The last night they had spent here they suddenly asked her would it be possible for her to return with them to that lake right in the heart of the tourist industry in the South Island of New Zealand, to write up about the South Horizon sheep-station from pioneer days on. "Hannah was the only rotten apple in the barrel, believe us. Came into it only by marriage. The rest deserve their story should be written." They would pay her return fare, a salary, give her time off to explore the rest of the country. She told

them she would consider it and let them know when they returned.

It hadn't taken her long to make up her mind, but as she was doing it mainly because it concerned her own forebears, though they wouldn't know that, she would pay her own way. The wonderful bonus the Salvatore family had given her could take care of that. She'd had her salary and keep when she had written Miss de Carteret's autobiography. She'd been a well-known local author and it had been so job-satisfying to complete every word of it before Fanchon's frailty had caught up on her. She had actually read the proofs before she died.

It had been so sweet of her to leave her home to Georgina, to say nothing of astounding, but Georgina hadn't accepted it. There were so many nieces and nephews, all with families of their own, to whom it rightly belonged. Georgina wanted no contesting of the will, no unpleasantness, and it had worked out well, all were still her friends. It had happened just about the time Ward had come into her life. She hadn't told him. He was virtually a stranger, even if they

were on that delightful, hovering-upon-the-brink stage of falling in love.

Soon Sarah and Eleanor would be back. She could certainly take them to Ellen's grave, glad that the tombstone gave away no hint that her first child had borne a different surname from the other two.

Right now she had no idea how Ward would react to her news of the New Zealand trip. Ah, here were the offices. It must have been a long meeting. Ward wasn't free yet. Mel Jacobs, at the desk, said: "But he can't be much longer, Georgina. Perhaps you'd like to wait in that little room? More private than this waiting-room. I'll tell him you're here when they've finished."

"Don't tell him till they've gone. I don't want to butt in on something that's nothing to do with me." But, had she known, it was everything to do with her.

* * *

It was a balmy day so the windows were wide open to the sea-breezes and

presumably those in the consulting-office were too. It carried the men's voices only too clearly to her.

"We are delighted to offer you the partnership, Ward. We appreciate your dedication to your work, to your obvious ambition, your good relations with the travelling public. The only reason we hesitated earlier was that though we prefer a younger partner, it was also essential he should put some capital into the business and how much better that it should be available without involving you in having to raise a loan in order to be able to buy in."

Another voice: "And of course we do like any partner to be well and happily settled in life. It seems as if your fiancée must be the ideal marriage partner for you. Nice too that she's connected with the firm, even if just part-time. We've had such excellent reports about her from the office on the island. They had said they would like her to work fulltime for them now Miss de Carteret is gone. A very interesting piece of work that. Her publishers contacted us about the acknowledgement in the

foreword giving thanks for the research that particular branch of the firm was able to render her."

That was where Georgina really pricked up her ears. Till then she'd just been feeling uncomfortable about what she was overhearing and was considering a noiseless retreat to the waiting-room. But now . . . he'd been jumping the gun a bit, hadn't he? She hadn't said yes yet, had asked for time to consider. She told herself not to get too steamed up about that. He might have said near-fiancée or just that he'd probably be marrying Georgina Innes in time. She was surprised he could buy into a partnership without a loan, but perhaps his parents were making him one, interest-free. That would be it. Perhaps this chance was what had spurred him on to ask her to marry him, feeling he'd really have something to offer her.

Ward's voice: "She *is* the right stuff. We are both very lucky. The de Carteret legacy couldn't have come at a better time for both of us. It's a valuable property."

At that moment, for Georgina, it seemed as if the world stood still. The

de Carteret legacy . . . valuable . . . *But she hadn't told Ward.* Her brain whirled, trying to grasp at the time sequence. It spanned quite a few weeks. She realized something. When the lawyers had first sent for her, Ward hadn't even asked her out. The news must've been leaked. That sort of thing was always happening.

Had she been going out with him when it happened, it would have been natural for her to have told him. She'd asked the old lady's family not to gossip about her refusal to take it, and of course they'd known that wouldn't be wise. She didn't want the money. It had embarrassed her. She earned well, especially at her free-lance secretarial work, and Marius Salvatore, with the full consent of his family, in fact at their instigation, had given her that marvellous bonus. Apart from all that, in a case like this, relatives might contest the will and Miss de Carteret's nieces and nephews had been so marvellous to her long before her books had become a success.

There came the sound of chairs being pushed back. Georgina rose, fled into the reception office, said quietly but

intensely, "I'm not staying. I've just realized I'm late for an appointment. Would you tell Mr. Selham I couldn't wait but tell him not to make any definite decisions till he sees me."

"About what?" Mel asked, naturally. She knew them both well.

Georgina said dryly. "He'll know. And by the way I think you should know that when the side-room windows are open, and the board-room ones too, every word can be heard. You needn't give him my message till the London men are gone, but very soon after."

She went back across the water and, in the privacy of home spent a long, unhappy, humiliating time thinking it out.

Ward was definitely uneasy when he arrived, said he had eaten, no, he didn't want coffee, what was this urgent business? She had a strong idea Mel must've mentioned the windows. That he knew where she had waited. She didn't beat about the bush.

She took him into her father's office, a business-like room. Her voice, too, was business-like. She had been terrified it

might quaver. She said simply, "I heard about the partnership through those open windows, Ward. It was news to me you even knew what Miss de Carteret had done. It happened before you first took me out, so I didn't want it talked about."

He said, "Well, perhaps it was natural then, not to tell me but surely now . . . you see things like this always get out and I thought . . . "

"You don't have to tell me what you thought. I heard it for myself. Yes, these things do get out but don't always get out fully. What you didn't find out, Ward, was that I didn't accept it. Immediately. Miss de Carteret's money belonged to her family. Not to me."

"You what? You must be mad! You did a great job for her. It must have been her wish. Look, I thought you were just being secretive. I felt hurt. Then the offer of the partnership came out of the blue. It would benefit us both. A very good start. I had to close with it or lose the chance. I was going to tell you — "

The grey eyes looked green as they flashed and he shifted his gaze, looked

down at his feet, Georgina was suddenly disgusted with herself, at her lack of discrimination. How had she imagined herself in love with him? She felt hot, despising words rushing to her tongue, but clenched her fingers so hard the nails bit into her palms. Her tone was flat, convincing. "It's no use, Ward. I've seen through you. It's over. No wonder I found myself, to my surprise, hesitating about being engaged. Must've been instinct. Just accept I won't marry you."

He said, with a look of distress that, had she loved him, would have moved her: "If this gets out it puts paid to my chances. What are you going to say? Everybody expects us to get engaged. I — I did commit myself to the directors on an impulse."

"Oh, Ward, it wasn't an impulse. The partnership mightn't have cropped up when you first asked me out, but the windfall you thought had been dropped into my lap tempted you, didn't it? It was done in a calculating way. I wonder when you'd have told me? And how you'd have reacted when you found out it was all for

nothing. Don't worry about *this* leaking out. I won't even be here. In a few days' time those two New Zealand women are coming back. I've found the grave of the woman they wanted traced and I'm going to New Zealand with them to write the history of a pioneer lake-station property there with a most romantic name, South Horizon. The further my horizon gets from you the better. You'll just have to say to the London Office you aren't going to be married after all, and, I don't bear you any ill-will, I hope you can get a loan from your parents or a bank. I'm sure you can spin a good yarn to Head Office. My friends here can just think I have itchy feet and prefer travel to marriage. I took off for Italy last year. They'll think it's gone to my head."

He knew she was adamant, was perhaps relieved she wasn't going to air her grievance to their office colleagues, so when she said, moving to the door, "Well, that's it. You'd better get the next ferry," he moved too.

At the front door he suddenly turned back, reached for her, tried to draw her to him, said, "It wasn't just the money,

Georgina, I — I was attracted. I know you're hurt, but we did have something going for us, didn't we? Don't let it end like this. Oh, darling — "

He was amazed at her recoil from him. She said, "Yes, we did have something going for us . . . and it's *gone*. I don't think I'm hurt. I do know I'm revolted. I sincerely hope I never see you again. Goodbye."

* * *

Georgina went back into the empty house. Very empty. Dad's life as a consultant engineer had accustomed her to long spells without her parents, but at this moment Venezuela was much too far away. Their last letter had told her they'd be out of touch except in emergency. It had been a great joy to both Dad and Mother to have Humphrey, her brother, as his father's assistant on this project. Mother had so often felt torn between her husband's needs and her children's. This time Georgina hadn't missed them so much because of Ward. Desolation swept over her, not so much for loss of

Ward, but for the loss of her dreams. Her future had seemed a less lonely one.

Nevertheless it was a good thing she had hesitated earlier. Why had she? She answered that honestly and said aloud in a voice that surprised her: "Because you were in love with love . . . what poor judgement. Don't wallow. You haven't got a broken heart; you've got an exciting time ahead and those two women are going to be over the moon when you tell them you are going to South Horizon to write its pioneer history for them. Not only pioneer stuff, but the history of the generations that succeeded the early settlers and brought your grandmother into the world . . . dear Cluny!"

* * *

As Eleanor and Sarah came ashore Georgina once more felt a wave of sheer affection for them as they said: "It's just wonderful to be coming back. It's like coming home. Those two nights we spent with you were unforgettable. We hadn't looked for such a personal interest in our quest. Most folk trace

their own forebears but you didn't seem to regard us as quaint seekers from the Antipodes intent on an old unhappy story of someone who was no blood relation to us. Have you found out where she lies? It's too much to hope you've managed to find out if she had a happier life when she came home to this lovely island."

"Not too much to hope at all, my dears. After lunch we can go to Ellen's grave. I'm able to tell you she didn't wilt on the bough. She met and married a gentleman named Pierre Molyneux some years later. He was of French extraction. His forebears fled here from the French Revolution and lived on the far side of the island. Perhaps because that way they could look across the Channel to the shores of their homeland."

Sarah broke in. "That's romantic in itself. It will make a happier ending to Ellen's story. Our mother hoped it might be so, said George was such a fine man he wouldn't have wanted Ellen to remain scarred by her experiences at Hannah's hand."

Eleanor's voice was full of eagerness. "Perhaps we shouldn't ask yet if you've

given thought to coming back with us. But we're dying to know. We kept talking about it through all those lovely countries we've seen. We were even tempted to ring the London office to ask Mr. Selham about it but thought we shouldn't. After all, he's not likely to be in favour of the idea."

Georgina managed a grin. "He's not, but not at the thought of a three months' separation. After you'd gone to the continent he asked me to marry him and — well to put it bluntly, I turned him down. He's not the man I want to spend the rest of my life with. It's nothing to do with the trip to New Zealand but it will make it easier for us both if I'm out of the country just now. I work only part-time for the firm, but he's been offered a top position in the Southampton office so it's a godsend really."

Sarah took a quick step forward and hugged her. "My dear, if you could know how happy this makes us. We'd set our hearts on it. We leave in ten days. Can you be ready? We must try to get you on our plane immediately. Our nephew has got us booked in business class, so

much more space. Lovely side-lockers for your bits and pieces. In fact I'll phone him. If anyone can pull strings, it's him. He's the sort to move mountains. I take it your passport is a current one. We must — ”

Georgina boggled. "Surely your nephew couldn't pull strings from thirteen thousand miles away? It won't be necessary, anyway. As a family we are so much travelled, it's a piece of cake. I'd better tell you that I'm paying my own fare. I know you said that my return would be guaranteed but I'm adamant about this. I've always wanted to see New Zealand so I'm looking on it as a holiday. You know I told you about doing that history for an Italian family? I not only got paid a very generous salary but due to some very valuable discoveries I made, the family gave me a large bonus. Said I might be able to make a trip to see my parents. But this time, I want it to be New Zealand. It'll be the holiday of a lifetime."

Eleanor said: "We'd better put something straight. Then argue about who pays for what. Seth, our nephew, isn't thirteen thousand miles away, he's in

London, and coming down here to see for himself who may be available to write the history. He won an award. To do with high-country farming. Has spent three months here and is travelling home with us. How nice it will be. Four is a much better number than three and it's always good to have a man along when you're travelling."

A chuckle escaped Georgina, "Not these days, surely. Women are pretty liberated and casual aren't they?" She looked at them shrewdly. "I hope he approves this impulsive plan of yours. I expect he's really coming to make sure you've not committed yourself to someone wanting a free holiday."

Sarah said innocently, "Oh, we assured him you weren't like that."

Georgina's eyes gleamed mischievously. "So he *did* think that?"

"Well, not exactly, just said, 'Hope you know what you're doing, my dear, dotty aunts.' That shows he wasn't seriously doubting us. He said it most affectionately. It was more that he wondered if anyone from here, especially someone who'd written a history for an

Italian family, knew what she was letting herself in for, coming to a place on a remote lake without even a road leading to it. That we ought to know it didn't always work."

Georgina fixed them with a penetrating look. "Was he thinking that back in the Edwardian era bringing a bride from here had proved a disaster for South Horizon?"

Sarah sparked up in the nephew's defence. "He wouldn't. Like the rest of the family, sympathy has always been on Ellen's side."

Georgina let it go. What did a nephew matter, anyway? It was Sarah and Eleanor's husbands who ran the place. They sounded very tolerant, indulgent men. The two sisters had said, "They felt we deserved this trip, after all our years on the place. In our early married life, we had only the Government launch calling once a fortnight. Now, of course we have our own launches. And we share a barge with the Campions at Twin Hills, to take the wool bales to Ludwigtown."

Magic feathered Georgina's wrists. Campions . . . descendants of the folk

who'd helped Ellen when she fled.

They set off across the island and weren't to know that Georgina was a little tense, knowing she mustn't give herself away by revealing too much knowledge. She wanted to see for herself the setting her great-grandmama had faced. She owed it to that disillusioned young wife not to reveal that she had kept the secret of George's child to herself so the child might not grow up possessed by Hannah Macpherson.

She was glad it was a sunlit day as they came to the little graveyard. Eleanor and Sarah had a tiny bunch of rosebuds and forget-me-nots they had chosen with care in a shop in Cowes.

The first leaves of autumn were scattering across the peaceful dwellings of the dead, lavender, growing on a nearby grave drifted fragrance across it. Sarah said, "How apt. In the linen closet at home there are still the lavender bags Ellen made. Their scent is long since gone but Mother would never have them thrown out." Again Georgina felt delight pulse in her veins.

The grave was immaculate. The stone was large but simple. It said:

'In loving memory of Ellen,
very beloved wife of
Pierre Molyneux and devoted mother of
Cluny, Guillaume, Laurette.

To know her was to love her
and we are sure
Her laughter will still echo
in Heaven.'

All three fell silent, then Sarah said, shakily, "Oh, how glad I am they said that about her laughter. Mother spoke of it. It was special. Even old Hannah couldn't quench it. How wonderful that they felt even Death couldn't." She turned to Georgina, "Oh, dear girl, you've been moved to tears too, for someone you had never even heard of till we came here, seeking her grave."

Eleanor was staring at the stone, fascinated. "Look Sarah . . . not all of her memories could have been bitter ones. She used that family name of the Macphersons for her first-born . . . Cluny!

I find that touching, and forgiving. But of course she loved George. There was never any doubt of that."

Georgina was rigid. Had she, by bringing them here, given too much away. How could she have forgotten Cluny was a Macpherson name? And these women came of the same stock.

Eleanor said, as to one who wouldn't know, "It's a place-name to do with the clan. George must've told Ellen. How sweet. You said Pierre was a gentle man. I'm glad you found that out. He mustn't have minded. Their next two children, I see, bore French names. Guillaume and Laurette. Perhaps I'm being wishful, but it might be possible she thought of our mother, who was Laura, the twelve-year-old who adored Ellen."

Georgina said, "I think you could surmise that. If she wanted the name Cluny retained it's quite possible she looked back in love and gratitude to little Laura."

The other headstone had Pierre's name on it but was a memorial only and recorded the fact he had died at sea a few years later.

"What was the story behind that . . . or don't you know? And would it be possible to trace these three children or their descendants?"

"I do know. Guillaume emigrated to the States, and Laurette joined him there. Both married Americans. Pierre went to visit them and died on the ship coming back."

"And Cluny?"

"She's over there too." Georgina thought that was wise, though Cluny was just visiting. Mother had thought she would be nearer her if she stayed in Florida. Georgina knew a longing to claim kinship, but she mustn't. These two women were delightful, but South Horizon had come to their branch of the family because as far as anyone at that remote property knew, George had had no heir. Their husbands might view a long-lost true descendant turning up with natural dismay. Come to that, even the women, though naively pleased with the discovery Ellen had married again, might not greet this news with joy.

The two sisters looked at each other. "Then there's no link left here. It was

so long ago. How scattered some families are."

Eleanor filled the little stone vase they had bought with the flowers, got Georgina to take a photo of them standing by the grave. "It may provide an illustration of the fact that Ellen still remembered South Horizon. I wish Ellen might have known Mother called me Eleanor as a variant of Ellen. The Campions will be glad to know she found happiness again. Her story is part of their history too. Now dear, back to your home to set things in train for your visit to the Lake of the Kingfisher. I'm sure you'll love it."

By mid-morning next day Georgina had got her booking and was preparing lunch prior to taking them on a tour of the island. A fish pie was browning under the grill; Sarah was whipping cream for a delectable pavlova, while Eleanor was hulling strawberries to decorate it. They wanted a long afternoon.

Georgina heard a car being driven away and the doorbell rang. She said, "Keep an eye on that pie, will you, and put it in the warming-drawer when it's done," and went into the hall. She opened the

door and a very bulky man seemed to fill the aperture. A tawny sort of man, with stubbly hair and overhanging eyebrows. Of all things he had a large case at his feet and a travel-bag slung from one shoulder. Must be a mistaken address. She lifted her own coppery brows, said, "Yes?"

She felt his voice matched the brows. Rather severe. "Miss Georgina Innes? I believe you have my aunts here. I'm Seth Oliphant."

Georgina blinked. "Oliphant?" she repeated, rather stupidly, she thought. "Oh, they did mention a nephew, but not by name. Did you want to see them? I hope nothing's wrong. They thought you were still in London."

He said, "I also hope there's nothing wrong. When they first told me of this crazy idea of taking you right to New Zealand, I hoped they'd forget it, or that you'd turn them down. When I found it was all fixed up, I came post-haste."

Georgina's hackles rose. She said coldly, "I think you'd better come through. I didn't realize you had to give permission. They aren't innocents abroad you know. They seem very capable to

me, as they ought to be at their age, and it might have escaped your notice that women make their own decisions these days."

"Of course I do. New Zealand gave women the vote in eighteen-ninety-three. Your crowd didn't even start agitating for it till into the next century."

Georgina had her dander up, "But then I thought that South Horizon was so isolated, it was probably still a man-dominated territory, with a remark like that from you."

To her annoyance he gave a bark of a laugh. "Don't you believe it. We had a real tartar of a woman ruling the roost once. Old Hannah."

Georgina rallied. "What your aunts have proposed to me is in my line of work. They came to consult the genealogical branch of a firm I work for part-time and when they heard I did secretarial work and research for people wanting family history written, they proposed this. I thought it over and accepted. What's wrong with that? I'm not ripping anyone off, you know."

She could hear the beater whipping

cream still and hoped neither aunt would emerge till she put this arrogant stranger in his place.

He said: "Not ripping anyone off? Have you any idea how much the return airfare to New Zealand is? To say nothing of your salary for what could be a lengthy task?"

Georgina's chin came up and fiery green glints flashed in her grey eyes, "I've every idea of what it costs. I just booked my flight on the aircraft your aunts are taking. *But it isn't going to cost them a penny!* I'm paying my own, and, although as yet they don't know it because I realize I'll have another argument on my hands about that, I'm not accepting a salary. I'm looking on this as a holiday. Have always longed to visit New Zealand, and last year I received a substantial bonus from an Italian family I worked for, with the proviso I spend it on something dear to my heart. *And this is it.*" Her eyes fell on the luggage at his feet. "And what's this in aid of? Why didn't you get that taxi to take you straight on to your hotel then come here?"

The jutting brows flew up and the angry eyes looked straight into hers. "Because seeing I may be giving you the hospitality of *my* home for a few months, I don't think it would be too much to expect you to offer me yours for a few nights!"

For a moment Georgina couldn't find her voice. She swallowed, was annoyed to hear herself gulp, like a child caught out in some misdemeanour, but managed: "Your home? What do you mean? I'm going to the estate your aunts' husbands run. On the lake. What business can it be of yours?"

He made a sound of sheer exasperation. "What business is it of mine? I only own the place. I'm Seth Oliphant of South Horizon. How scatty can you get? Imagine accepting an invitation like this and not knowing the situation. The uncles work for me."

Georgina had heard of knees turning to jelly. Now she was experiencing it. She put out a hand to steady herself on the umbrella stand. She must rally. Those two women in the kitchen would come in search of her any moment. They

mustn't find them brawling. She gave her head a little shake as if to clear it and said with a most convincing and fierce spurt of defiance, "Those two darlings are having a wonderful time. I took them to see Ellen's grave. They cried. With joy. I can't bear to have you dash that delight. I'm sorry I didn't know it wasn't for them to invite whom they willed. But you mustn't be rough on them. Can we somehow bridge this gap? If you forbid me to come, I can't come, of course, but . . . they are in my kitchen this very moment preparing lunch. I invite you to share it and to stay till we get this sorted out. But for goodness' sake act civilised. They could come through that door any moment."

They did. Georgina stared at the aunts. They stared at their nephew. They didn't look a bit abashed. They uttered twin cries of delight, "Seth . . . how perfectly wonderful. How ever did you get here?" and the next moment the forbidding Seth had to open his arms wide in a gesture of greeting as his two slim aunts cast themselves upon him.

Georgina perceived that the peculiar

and rather grotesquely carved and uncomfortable chair Dad had once brought back from some outlandish place was right behind her. Thankfully she subsided on to it.

2

To outward appearances it was a cordial meal. What ever Seth Oliphant's feelings he behaved as if their recent clash had never been. If he intended to lash out at her again, it seemed as if he would do it in private. But would he, somehow, manage to prevent her going? Suddenly Georgina knew how fiercely she desired to see South Horizon.

The aunts overwhelmed him with their enthusiasm, their delight in not only having discovered Ellen's grave, but that she had found happiness again and had even named her first child Cluny, a Macpherson name. "Just as if she wanted to retain some memory, Seth, of George and South Horizon. Don't you think it was sweet?"

He smiled at them almost indulgently. "It was. I've thought ever since we discovered those diaries of George's that it wasn't all unhappiness for her. That

apart from old vindictive Hannah they had a life of their own and some very happy moments."

It wasn't the sort of remark Georgina expected from this beetling-browed stranger. She'd thought he'd be cynical about that long-ago heartbreak; to have toned down their exuberance, even undermine their resolve to get the family history written.

She said, eyes alight, "Do you mean there are actually diaries of his in existence? That passages could be used? That's the sort of thing that makes history spring to life under the keys of your typewriter." The next moment she almost flinched from the look he gave her, while the aunts were getting the pavlova out of the fridge. She knew what it meant, that dagger-bright challenge. It meant: "If you ever get to write it! If you ever reach South Horizon." She was aware that if this man could stop her from going, he would. He thought she'd be a plaguey nuisance at the homestead; that it could be frowned upon in turn by Sarah and Eleanor's husbands. Even derided. Or

forbidden. Well, she was prepared to do battle.

By the time they finished coffee and cheese straws Seth said easily, "Aunts, how about you doing the dishes? I'd like Miss Innes to take me out for a walk. She'll know all the landmarks. Rosamond McQueen asked me to visit some. She gave me a list to bring back photos of spots she saw with old Gaspard when he discovered her in Southampton, before he sent her off to Christchurch to be the compere for his fashion shows. The more distant places I'll hire a car for. To reach Shanklin Chine, for instance. She has also commanded me to walk along the wall of Carisbrook Castle as they did and remember the ill-fated Charles the First standing there yearning towards France and the ship with a fair wind behind it . . . the ship that never came."

Georgina almost boggled. Such imagery from the man who'd bawled her out not an hour ago! Though she didn't doubt his wish to have her to himself was to continue, if not the bawling, at least the dissuading. To cover up her surprise she said, "How unexpected, to find you have

a friend connected with the Isle of Wight. Does she live in Christchurch?"

Sarah answered. "No, she lives on the lake, about three bays away. She did only the one show for Gaspard. She married his grandson who runs Strathdearn Station, Matthieu. Talk about romance. Gaspard then married her grandmother, his first sweetheart. Rosamond worked at Dellabridge's in Southampton. You'll know it? But South Horizon is a little more remote than Strathdearn.

Seth's voice was derisive. "A *little* more remote! That's the understatement of the year. They've even got a road now. Didn't when Rosamond first went there. But that road will never join up with Horizon. There's an unbridgeable river between. It cuts through a great gash in huge cliffs. We've only got a mule-track round the head of the lake. The next generation might get a road. So if you're thinking of a tourist attraction like Queenstown, which is famous world-wide, Miss Innes, you'd better think again. No-one gets out of South Horizon except by boat or on horseback. Bar emergencies when we can call in a helicopter."

She managed to smile. "Sounds ideal for a short stretch of time. I'm not exactly digging in. Just the place for a writer anxious to shut herself away from all distractions while she gets on with the job. I'll want to study the atmosphere, what ever papers relating to the early days still exist, notes, letters, diaries, authentic records of conditions prevailing then . . . thumbnail sketches of each succeeding generation, personalities, anecdotes. Then down to work on the first draft. Don't feel you're saddled with a new chum to this sort of work. Fanchon Carteret's autobiography included her family tree too."

He shrugged. "A bit different. You'd know the gen about the Isle of Wight so well. It would be second nature to you. It's different at Horizon. Not a gentle world at all."

She levelled a look at him. "I'm hardly restricted to writing of what I've known. The history of the Salvatores, for instance. That was not only a different world but all the records were in a foreign language. I have only a smattering of Italian. It was a great challenge. Fortunately the family

freed Marius to be with me most of the time so he could translate. An English publisher was interested. That was why I came in to it. Marius had a perfect command of English. The job at South Horizon isn't going to give me butterflies in the stomach. Eleanor, Sarah, if you don't mind doing the dishes, I'll get going with Seth. I daresay he doesn't want to spend too long on the Island."

His look was bland. "Oh, I've finished all my business. Time is no object now."

Georgina gritted her teeth. It sounded as if she was stuck with him.

As they closed the front door, Seth Oliphant gave a most maddening chuckle. "Point taken, my dear Miss Innes. You'd rather my stay was of very short duration, wouldn't you?" When she didn't reply he said, "Admit it."

She stopped dead on the pavement, turned so she could measure glances with him. He turned too. Green lights had again pencilled themselves in her eyes and as the breeze off the Solent stirred the short fringe on her brow, the copper crest gave her an aggressive look. "Admit it? Of course I'll admit

it. I won't let those two dear women know your presence is unwelcome, but I won't pretend when we're alone. I want this break, not just as a job. I've more than enough to last me for months, but because it will suit me very well to be away from here just now, for personal reasons. You've made it very plain that I'm unwelcome on the lake but that won't stop me even if it doesn't exactly add to my enjoyment of life. But I won't overstay. As soon as I get enough gen for my first rough draft, I'll find quarters in Ludwigtown or Arrowtown to put it together. Now . . . let me see your list. But just around here, the next corner, is a very historic spot . . . "

For the rest of the next hour they were as polite to each other as any two sharing the landmarks of interest. Georgina couldn't help warming to her subject, in this place that had known much royal patronage since Queen Victoria and the Prince Consort had bought their holiday home here, Osborne House, when the future King Edward the Seventh was a little less than four years old.

She couldn't fault Seth for interest. As

they neared the house again he reverted to the isolation of South Horizon. He led up to it obliquely. "I've loved Britain. I've marvelled at the size of the population she supports. We have crowded areas in some of our cities, but nothing like hers. Even the more remote areas here hardly seem so to me. To someone like you used to close contact with villages, towns, railways, with a whole continent across the Channel, that stretch of water just comparable with our Cook Strait that divides the two main islands, life as lived at Horizon will seem incredibly cut-off. A family history spanning a hundred and forty years or so isn't something to be dashed off in a few weeks; you may find the lack of entertainment, of no streets or bright lights hard to take, even rather scaring."

Georgina couldn't help it. She said, mock-admiringly, "That's quite a speech. Tell me, did what ever you've been engaged in over here consist largely of lectures on sheep-farming or debates on the accessibility of markets or something? So that it's become a habit. Reminds me of something Queen Victoria is reputed

to have said, rebukingly, to, I think, Mr Gladstone, telling him to stop addressing her as if she were a public meeting."

She looked for umbrage but didn't get it. This big hunk of male superiority stopped dead, put his head back and guffawed. "You've quite a turn of phrase yourself, Miss Innes. I like it. Maybe you won't find it so boring at the Lake after all. You'll probably strike sparks off everyone in our large family and staff and thoroughly enjoy yourself!"

She had to laugh but managed, "And I haven't spent all my life among cities and villages. My father's work has taken him to some very isolated places in the world. Africa, India, the Middle East, Alaska, South America. He's in Venezuela at the moment. When we were young Mother was torn between Dad and us. If it happened to be a wealthy project the firm might fly Humphrey and me out to them in the school holidays. I didn't find it scary, even sleeping in a tent with strange animal noises outside and lots of creepy-crawlies. Now you've done your best to scare me off and it hasn't worked. I daresay your aunts are

at liberty to invite whom they like to their own houses. For the first time I'm beginning to understand how the young Ellen must've felt when the man she loved took her to the bottom of the world and she had to face the redoubtable Hannah. You yourself referred to her as the vindictive Hannah, so I feel I can refer to her like that too. It seems to me that a touch of her nature has persisted into this generation. You ought to watch it."

A hateful amusement sounded in his voice. "You're way off-beam. Hannah isn't in *my* family tree. She was just someone George's father ought never to have married. I inherited South Horizon from a much-loved stepfather. I'm very grateful to think that I'm not kin to her and that my descendants won't have a drop of Hannah's blood either."

It was at that moment that Georgina realized something. That Hannah's blood ran in her own veins. She'd never thought about it before. It wasn't a palatable thought.

It wasn't possible to remain in a state of hostility back at the house, with two

such happy people as Sarah and Eleanor. They insisted on Georgina accompanying them to the places Rosamond McQueen wanted Seth to visit. She gave in to the inevitable, said no need to hire a car, that she would drive them. The following day when his visit to Ellen's grave was over, insisted upon, of course, by the aunts, she offered him the car, on the reasonable pretext that she had many things to attend to, in preparation for leaving the house. "Not that it's the hassle some folk would find it. My parents' absences are so frequent, we've most things under control. We've an arrangement with neighbours about oversight and the garden."

Seth said, "Is this the only property you have to see about?"

She blinked. "Yes, we aren't extensive land-owners." What an odd thing to say.

In the evening she asked Seth about the availability of records: If it might be difficult in so remote a spot for access to early shipping lists, for the dates when the very first Macphersons had come from Scotland, about title-deeds

and the succession.

He pulled a face. "With some families it might be necessary for anyone recording a history, to spend time at the Alexander Turnbull library in Wellington, the capital, but not at Horizon. You'll find all the documents stored, gathering dust, up in the attics of the two old houses. They're so large, with being added to by generation after generation, nothing needed to be thrown away on the excuse there wasn't room. There are the old ship-chests, tin trunks, old ottomans and glory-boxes — or do you call those hope-chests? I just hope you have some idea how tedious it will be delving into the welter of material we have. Added to that, all previous generations seem to have been copious and wordy diary-keepers. It's a hundred and forty years since the first settlers came to Moana-kotare."

She looked at him pityingly, "Seth Oliphant . . . when I went to do the Salvatore history it encompassed six hundred years and more, and included wars and their aftermaths and all that country went through before it became the Italy we know now."

That maddening chuckle! "One up to you, Georgina Innes."

Sarah said indulgently, "You two argue as if you are already of the one family."

The tawny eyebrows descended. "Tell me . . . is it always like that? Do you get on to familiar terms pronto, with the households whose history you are delving into?"

She lifted guileless eyes. "Hardly. Miss de Carteret and I worked alone and in complete harmony. As for Marius and his family they were so courteous. Like something out of another century."

If he noticed the dig he didn't display it. He merely said, "You must be most adaptable. But then it pays, doesn't it?" She didn't like the sound of that. It seemed suavely despising.

Her tone was flippant. "I aim to please, of course."

On their last night she said, "May I take it in turns to sit with you two on the plane, Sarah and Eleanor? I promise not to talk your heads off, I'm a good sleeper in the air. I've done so much of it."

"In turns with the three of us,"

Sarah amended. "Seth is much more knowledgeable than us about the territories we fly across."

Georgina shrugged. "But it's mostly flying over tracts of ocean. Nothing to be knowledgeable about."

Seth grinned. "Oh, come on. You can't write off the huge width of America like that. If visibility's good there'll be a lot to see, a bit of Canada too, Newfoundland first. I'm glad we're going straight through with just a short stop at Los Angeles. Oh, there'll be a lot to comment on."

Eleanor's tone was affectionate. "And Seth's rarely at a loss for words. He's no strong, silent hero. Can't stand them myself. We are supposed to communicate. Makes for a more friendly world."

He grinned. "My dear, doting aunts . . . I'm not a hero of any kind. Just a tough Colonial with a gift of the gab, inclined to drop into long paragraphs and lecture-type statements, like poor Gladstone to Queen Victoria . . . I've been told that on the best of authority."

"Who was rude enough to tell you that?" demanded Eleanor.

Again the grin. "You wouldn't believe it of this person if I did tell you."

"Someone in Ludwigtown is my bet," she argued. "Probably envious of you getting this award. Better if you didn't tell me. Might be someone I'd like otherwise. And it makes me mad."

Georgina avoided Seth's eyes. She said mockingly, "I've flown over the States before, and over a good deal of Canada too. I might steal your thunder, Seth. But I don't know much about the Pacific."

At that moment the phone rang. Seth was nearest so she motioned him to answer. He said, "Yes, she is here. Just one moment. Here's excitement for you. A person-to-person call for Georgina. An international one."

She knew an alarmed leap of the heart. It could be her grandmother, Cluny, ringing from Florida. And she'd never called her anything but Cluny. If she suddenly started calling her Granny, Cluny would think she'd gone bonkers. Oh, what if the operator had already said her name? If she went round to the other phone, that would mean leaving this receiver off while she did and voices

echoed. All this in a moment's panic. She managed, "Hullo, Georgina speaking," and the next moment was saying: "Oh, Marius darling, how sweet of you to ring. You must've just got my letter." Her voice had warmed, with relief as well as affection.

He was wishing her well for this journey to the South Pacific. She laughed at something he said, "No, of course not. I'm not likely to lose my heart to anywhere inland. Remember how I loved the sea, the fact that Naples is a port? I could never live away from the waves and the salt-tanged air. I expect it comes from being island-born and messing about with boats all my life. No, I can't say just how long it will take. Not as long as it took me with yours. It's a young country as far as colonisation is concerned, and it's just from pioneer times I'm to record. No . . . I hardly expect anything as exciting this time. It's all due to you, dear man, really. For my air-fare, I mean."

She couldn't help flicking a glance at Seth. She went on to ask after members of the family, listened to something with

a smile lifting the corners of her mouth, laughed, said, "Trust a Neapolitan to pay a compliment like that. But I feel that way, too. You're certainly a bright star in my particular firmament." She added something in Italian and hung up.

Her eyes looked tender and almost blue. "Dear Marius. Less than two years ago I hadn't even met him and now I can't imagine life without the Salvatore family. They've all visited here."

Sarah said fondly, her eyes alight, "I hope you'll come to feel as fond of us."

* * *

A sense of unreality possessed Georgina from Heathrow to Los Angeles and to Tahiti. Then on the final stage to Auckland at the top of the North Island of New Zealand, she suddenly felt she left her old self behind and prepared for meeting the country that had proved so sad a place for her great-grandmother. Most of that last lap was in darkness but then the sun rose and they began circling over a city of dazzling twin harbours

and gleaming high-rise buildings and countless lovely bays. They were blessed by a superb day, so that when later they flew south the North Island was spread below like a giant relief map with the Pacific on the east and the Tasman sea on the west. Even looking down Georgina could see what truly immense heights were encompassed in what looked like a narrow stretch of land. "Not so narrow really," said Seth's voice beside her, "people are inclined to judge the size of New Zealand by its population and by the huge land mass of Australia in such close proximity, but in reality it's larger than England and Scotland put together." He looked at her. "Don't take this amiss, but here our school lessons go deeply and widely into the history and geography of the rest of the world. I'm not sure if people in the Northern Hemisphere know as much about us. Mind you, that could be just my own impression. Do you know much about New Zealand?"

A slightly dry note rasped her tone. "I think you could say I know more than most. Not so much about the north as the south."

"Why? You haven't had much time to swot up since the aunts asked you, have you?"

She realized she must be more careful. She mustn't give away Cluny's connection with Lost Horizon. She'd always known that Ellen, so scarred by Hannah's hatred, had turned down her own parents' suggestion that the estate owed something to the support of George's posthumous child. Even after all these years the family there might doubt her motives.

She said, choosing her words carefully, "Perhaps we — my brother and myself — were brought up to be world citizens. We absorbed a lot of the history and geography of so many countries in our unusual school holidays, and with the marvellous letters Mother wrote us every week, we were acquainted with their needs and life-styles. And on a couple of projects, Dad worked with a man from the Far South. I feel that a little of me is still in those countries."

"H'm. Interesting." But he went off at a tangent. "Why is Italy in particular, dearest to your heart? I've gathered that

from time to time."

She didn't have to think that out. "Because of Marius, of course." She wasn't to know how her voice had softened on his name. "But apart from that it added to the enjoyment of some of the English poets who loved Italy so well last century and before. It made reading the Browning couple's verse come alive for me. Robert and Elizabeth." When no answer came from Seth she added, "Marius has a great interest in New Zealand. His family owed much to some New Zealand soldiers during the war, after the surrender of Italy. Some of those soldiers went back to visit them."

"Good. That works both ways. Some of our soldiers owe a lot to Italians who sheltered them in caves and cellars and fed them when they were short of food themselves. A great-uncle of mine was one. Nice to think succeeding generations on each side remember them. Look . . . to the west. Mount Egmont. Though we've reverted to its original name now, Mount Taranaki."

"Oh, how beautiful. A perfect cone, like Fujiyama."

"Yes, and soon in the centre of this island you'll see three volcanic mountains." It was all very friendly. Georgina felt the unease she had known at his former enmity subside. Just as well, as living in an isolated community, friction could be magnified. Perhaps paying her own fare had mollified him. She fell to thinking of Ellen's time there. Family knowledge had it that Hannah's resentment had been such that George, feeling the women, as always, needed a kitchen away from each other, had built them another house, close by, so that Hannah had to come to their door to come in. Cluny had said her mother had told her that was the happiest time of her life, though it had incensed Hannah even more.

"Mother said, Georgina, that for the first time they had a little world of their own, could share jokes without Hannah resenting their laughter, not have to conceal their affection for each other, have to explain everything they found funny that she couldn't. They were able to find great joy in little things that Hannah despised. To Hannah only work

mattered and the income it brought in, and she wrung every possible penny out of the land, cheese-paring in the house to a ridiculous degree. Mother said that time in their own house was her fondest memory when she came back here and had to bring me up, alone, and support me. That nothing could take that away. She said once that a quotation she read then meant everything to her. This was it: 'Memory is a treasure-chest where thieves cannot break in, nor rust or moth corrupt.' Remember that, Georgina, just as Mother did, at any time you may need it."

Now, oh glorious thought, she was to see that house, live in it, work in it, write letters to Cluny describing it in every last detail, "A dear higgledy-piggeldy house," Ellen had said, "Made out of whatever material was to hand, to spare expense."

She came out of her trance to give her attention to the three of them, because here was Wellington, a beautiful harbour . . . then across Cook Strait in an incredibly short time, the fretted outlines of the Sounds at the tip of the South

Island, a few tiny islands dotting the narrow waters and on the east coast the Seaward Kaikouras reaching their jagged outlines from the Southern Alps to the sea. Rivers snaked out from the gorges, spreading across the plains in odd braided riverbeds of glacierborne shingle, intersected by narrow streams that could be bank to bank in torrential rain or melting snows.

A brief touchdown at Christchurch, a wide-spread city edged by the hills of Banks' Peninsula, named for Captain Cook's famous naturalist, and on to Dunedin, two hundred miles south, the Oxford of New Zealand, cradled in hills that seemed more like mountains, the deep gash of its harbour and a city with an enduring look matching its reputation as the Edinburgh of the South. They would spend the night at a motel here and take a small plane on to Ludwigtown in the morning. "Our airport there is quite new. Once we had to go to Queenstown and make our way to our township."

The aunts had quite an evening phoning various friends. Seth and Georgina read, after they'd caught up with the TV

news. She found it surprisingly relaxing and it augured well for life at South Horizon. There they would be reliant on radio for news. "Most of the big sheep-stations have managed to get TV beamed in but they are closer to each other, can share the cost. We'll get it some day, which will make it easier to get and keep staff, but we've had a big outlay on upping the water access. Best thing we ever did. But despite all the drawbacks of isolation, Georgina, there's no place like it. Wait till you see it. It really does have this blue-green sheen on its waters like the Kingfisher's plumage. I like people to see it in the morning sun, not in the grey of twilight. That's why I persuaded the aunts not to go visiting tomorrow. I opted for the morning plane. What are you looking at me like that for?"

Her laughter was spontaneous. "Despite the fact you did all you could to put me off coming here, you're dying to show me Moana-kotare. What a complex character you are. Must be local pride. I trust I'll be able to ooh and aah up to your expectations."

He didn't look set back. "You will, even if it's only another job to you, and even if you can't bear to be away from the sea, the lake will get you."

* * *

Despite her confident predictions, Georgina wasn't really prepared for the impact on her to her first glimpse of the lake. In so small a plane there was nothing of the dulling approach to some airports. It swooped around, curved over the water, came to land on what was to Georgina, even used as she was to remote ones, a primitive landing-field, taxiing over a turf-edged runway to a tiny terminal building. In those moments before the wheels touched earth, her glimpse of the iridescent waters, the splendour of Mount Serenity, as classically shaped as Mount Taranaki, had given her a pang almost painful. A pang for her great-grandmother who had had to leave this beauty, alone, bereaved, carrying within her the seed of George's child. Her voice shook a little as she turned to Seth. "It's all you said and more," and she smiled.

The meeting between Sarah and Henry and Eleanor and Robert was beautiful to behold. No inhibitions there. But Seth was looking beyond them. "Where's Mother?"

The expressions on the men's faces changed. "Well, good to see you, but —"

"What is it?" demanded Seth quickly.

Robert said "Don't panic. It's not as bad as it might have been. Your mother and Linda Frome decided to do something off their own bat to help this water shortage. You know the old windmill by the shearers' quarters? They'd been nagging at us to try to get it going again. We told them it wasn't safe, that it had had its day but they sneaked off. Prue remembered that when it was last used, it had to be primed down the shaft with a jug of water to keep it going as soon as the wind stirred. So — "

Seth groaned. "Oh no! Who went up the ladder? Who got hurt?"

Henry said, grimacing. "Both of them. That insecure leg gave way, tilted the whole thing over. Prue was up the ladder, trust her! Linda was steadyng it. So both

copped it. Oh, it could have been much worse. They've only got broken legs. One each. It could've crushed them. Might have been fractured skulls or internal injuries. Linda's got more skin off. Both are well bruised. Happened yesterday afternoon. We immobilised the limbs. The rescue helicopter was rescuing some climbers, so we brought them over in the launch, gave the cottage hospital here a ring. The ambulance and Dr Riesdahl met us at the jetty. They're quite perky this morning, mainly furious that it came at this time. What with you lot returning home, lambing as near as dammit, and the correspondence lessons in full swing in the last term. Now . . . how are you? Jet-lag? And I suppose this is who the girls wrote to your mother about? The one who's going to write up the history. Sorry to greet you like this." He added, to Eleanor and Sarah, "You old globe-trotters! You've never been more welcome."

Georgina had the distinct feeling that degree of welcome didn't extend to her. Nobody would relish a stranger at a time like this, especially one not likely to be a

working member of the community. She said, very crisply, "I hope I'll be able to help you cope. I'm quite used to pitching in at moments of crisis."

Robert sounded doubtful. "But perhaps not under such remote conditions as these. We could arrange for you to stay here till we get things sorted out. About the children's lessons for instance. Seth, what do you think about — "

Seth's voice had a note in it Georgina couldn't analyse. "That wouldn't be much of a solution. Georgina's very versatile. She can handle most situations from doing research in foreign countries, making herself invaluable to charming Italians and eighty-year-old authors, is rather nifty with boats, which will suit the Horizon set-up, and I believe she once trained as a teacher. How about it, Georgina?"

It was meant as a challenge, of course, and she took it up. "Fine by me. Now, what do you all want to do? Hospital first, I suppose. I see there's a snack counter here. I'll stay guard by the luggage till you get your visit in. Take all the time you want."

She thought Robert and Henry looked at her with respect. "Oh, we've got the station-wagon here. We keep one this side. We'll put the stuff straight in."

She noticed the aunts weren't saying they could manage the lessons. They just accepted the men's decisions. She had an idea that this estate across the lake was a man-dominated kingdom, that womenfolk just went along with it. Well, she'd see about that! They could be in for a few surprises.

They insisted on her coming to the hospital. Seth's mother and Linda were in a small ward with windows framing that turquoise lake. They were remarkably compliant, perhaps deeming that best when they'd brought it upon themselves. As Seth kissed his mother he said: "Just one more instance of mis-naming, Mother dear, Prudence by name but reckless by nature."

Chat about the injuries and their general condition over, they turned with relief to Georgina though their eyes were very appraising. Perhaps the attitude of Eleanor and Sarah had reassured them. They'd said, twinkling, "Wasn't

it wonderful of us, to produce Georgina, dear girl, right at this very moment? She has the knack of being able to pull things out of hats . . . like taking us straight to Ellen's grave. Prue, she took us into her own home, gave us a wonderful time. And listen . . . that feeling of guilt towards Ellen that has persisted down through the years has been laid to rest. She remarried, a man of French extraction, and when she had her first child, she was actually allowed to call her Cluny after that side of the family, so we know she bore no malice and didn't quite forget George. Sweet, don't you think? And Georgina was clever enough to ferret all this out. Of course the Island is a small place, a darling spot. The only thing that disappointed us was that we weren't able to meet any of Ellen's descendants. They're all in the States. Oh, well, you can't have everything. And Georgina will be able to give the history the right personal touch because of this."

Georgina reflected she certainly could. Seth began to lay down the law. His mother and Linda took it very meekly,

as well they might. They were on no account to persuade the doctor into letting them come home too soon. "I'd rather you were under their eye, here, till any side-effects wear off and they're sure the plasters are comfortable. It will give Georgina a chance to rig up an office for herself in her free time after lessons. Though I daresay I'll have to put up with her invading mine a lot of the time. I've all the equipment, photocopier, computers, etc."

The light in the room with the big windows seemed to be changing all the time as the sun, escaping from the odd small cloud, moved over the scintillating surface of the lake and suddenly the brightness swept over Georgina.

Prudence said, "Oh, Georgina, you do remind me of someone. Stand right there a moment." Then she laughed, "Oh, it's nobody I actually know, it's just that I've lived with his picture so long. I suppose it's just the colouring, the red hair and greyish eyes. The old portrait of George. Perhaps not the features, because of course he's got a beard."

Georgina thought that was just as well.

A succeeding thought warmed her heart. She hadn't known what his colouring had been, but she liked to think it was repeated in her, three generations down the line.

3

SETH said to the aunts, "I'll leave you here for half an hour or so. Georgina can come with me. I'm off for the Post Office to collect our mail-bag. We'll get it two days sooner that way. Georgina, the tourist launch drops it off twice a week. You might like to post off that lot of postcards you've been writing up as we flew."

Ludwigtown had quite an air of an Austrian village, with heights above the little town covered with pines and the suggestion of a narrow gorge cleaving the hills. She said so.

He nodded. "It was largely settled by European gold-miners. In fact named after one, Ludwig Klausner, whose descendants still live here and keep in touch with their ancestral roots in the Northern Hemisphere. Some from there come here as ski instructors. We ought to care about the stock we come from. I find that admirable. Oh, dear,

I'm sounding pedantic again."

She said, consideringly, "I find it admirable too. That means the past is real to you. That you, and Sarah and Eleanor care enough about your forebears to put them on record so that generations coming after you will be able to identify with them also. Of course that's been my work for the last three years. Wonderful what one can unearth. Though it's always the little things that bring ancestors to life. I don't just trace family trees, I like to find out details about the daily lives of people who lived long ago, their habits, their foibles, the odd things that may have happened to them, either fact or legend. When that's done, it brings on to the pages former generations, not only for their descendants, but for people who like to read about earlier times and can turn a family record into a book fit for any library shelf."

"I agree. It was those things, the stories, handed down to me by a stepfather I loved dearly that made me identify so much with South Horizon. Sometimes it seems strange that but for the fact my mother married Stephen Macpherson

and I became his heir, it would never have come to me if George hadn't died, leaving no offspring. Yet now I can't imagine life without Horizon."

A frisson of something . . . alarm? apprehension? feathered over Georgina. It had seemed fun at first, when Eleanor and Sarah had first asked her to come, to accept. She had even kidded herself it had been meant to be, that she, a great-grandchild of George's, should visit scenes like this, to actually have the skill to do it. And later to be able to tell Cluny. Now she wondered had it been wise? If she was found out might it not bring disturbance, consternation, in this tightly-knit isolated family? They might well fear it, because even Stephen, brother to Eleanor and Sarah, hadn't been a close cousin. She became aware that Seth seemed to be repeating something. "Sorry, what did you say?"

"I said give me your mail, I'll get your stamps. Oh, I see they're not all for Britain. I'll check what postage is needed. Venezuela, the States, Italy. That one's very thick, it'll need weighing."

"Yes, I'd so much to tell him. It's to Marius."

He blinked as he weighed it in his hand, consideringly. "How in the world did you manage to write all this, while travelling?"

"I wrote it in bed last night. It was the only time I could."

"Very devoted," he remarked, with a hint of dryness. "But should I beg your pardon? To comment on one's mail is almost an intrusion on privacy. Well, if you are expecting an answer, I hope you got our address right." He turned the envelope to the back, saw it had the private bag address right then said, idly, "What's the 'C' for in your second name?"

She hesitated then said, "Does it matter?"

He looked mildly surprised. "No, why should it? I apologized for being inquisitive about your mail a moment ago. Perhaps I've an over-developed bump of curiosity. Let it go. I suppose it's an unusual name like Cleopatra or Cassandra. And it makes you sensitive, like me, though I'd no chance of hiding

a surname. I imagine most kids called Oliphant get called Elephant at school."

Georgina had a real note of indignation in her tone. "I can't think why! It's a perfectly good Scots name. Wasn't it originally de Olifard who accompanied King David the First from Winchester?"

"I believe so, though the true origin is, after all, from elephant, denoting great strength, so we can't complain. So you were interested enough to look it up?"

"Of course. You're part of the South Horizon scene now, even if just through a stepfather. Just as adopted children have a right to be. It's apt, anyway. You give the impression of strength. Rugged, like those landscapes we flew over." She knew she was prolonging this. So she was, purposely, because she didn't want him to go back asking about that initial. It might seem too much of a coincidence if she had to say it was Cluny.

He chuckled. "I know what you mean. Rough-hewn like the schist rocks round Alexandra. It's the profile. Guy, a six-year-old across at Horizon once said so."

"We seem to be getting too personal.

I suppose we need to get back for the others."

The next moment he electrified her by saying, "Oh, I told them to meet us at *The Cluny*. She's at her usual mooring. It'll be great to get my hands on the wheel again. Although we're so far inland we're like you island-dwellers, so often water-borne."

She had difficulty keeping her voice level. "That's the name of your launch?"

He nodded, "Yes, it's traditional. Each new one is named that. Right from the time the very first Macpherson brought his possessions across in a whale-boat to take up his grant of land. He was a Ewen too. During the 1745 Rising Ewen Macpherson of Cluny with 600 of the clan joined Prince Charles and was renowned in several engagements but didn't arrive in time for Culloden though he was very active in assisting his Prince to evade capture."

Georgina looked up at him, eyes alight, "That's the sort of background I want. I'll copy that down while you go into the Mail Centre. It's so easy to forget if you don't jot, and it could be, once I get

the first rough copy done and checked. I might be back in England before the final typing."

"Might you? Is that what you did with the Salvatore book? finish it at home?"

"No. I didn't leave Naples till it was done and in the printer's hands. Marius wanted it that way."

She thought he checked another comment. Perhaps it was in case she did think him too curious. He strode into the office.

Eleanor and Sarah joined them on the way, looking happy and excited. "The men are following. We almost feel guilty about being this way, with Linda and Prudence in hospital, but nothing can take away the joy of being home at last in our own dear place."

Robert's voice behind them, as the two men caught them up said, "It's a relief to hear that. Henry and I were scared stiff you'd get permanently itchy feet."

The Cluny was a trim craft in dazzling white with a painted curving stripe from bow to stern in dazzling green and blue, matching the lake where the noonday sun was striking back a thousand facets of

light. The far mountains, still shawled with snow, stared down at the waters which had too much shimmer today to reflect them. Some seemed to dip down right to the edge leaving hardly any shoreline. "Our bay is out of sight yet," she was told.

She hadn't expected such immensity. She said, "No wonder it took so long to put roads round to some homesteads. Apart from that mule-track you talk about, will there be other similar tracks about your property?"

Seth smiled and there was pride in his tone. "There is a vast hinterland back from our bay, the nearer reaches of which we use for specialized grazing. We've a network of roads leading out to those areas, all created by ourselves through the years."

"Oh, how interested my father will be when I write to tell him that. You must have leagues of fencing, then?"

"Yes, we do, but fortunately in this terrain, we get the benefit of natural boundaries, rivers, gullies, bluffs and so on. We just need snow-fences to keep the stock down from the heights in

winter. We got a grant to improve one or two of those valley roads because of us entertaining tourists for the day. You may not have heard that. We don't do it too often, just a few times yearly, to show them dipping and shearing. Never at mustering. It gives both New Zealand and overseas holiday-makers a chance to see life as lived in the high-country. Mostly the aunts' cater for them. They do it damned well. It's too disrupting to have too often but the ones who want to see such things are the very best type, really interested."

The homesteads across-lake were all exposed to the sun in their individual coves. Then they came to a dark gash cut into the hillside where a river had cleft its ruthless way through what must've been softer soil between granite-like rocks, to pour into the lake below. "That's the reason why although someday the over-lake road will reach Mahanga-Puke, which means twin hills, it won't reach us. It's unbridgeable. Our track goes the other way, a long traverse. It may be made into a road some time, but perhaps not during my life-span. It would only

come about if for some as yet unforeseen reason, that area was opened up. So we remain isolated except by water, like an island. But we have a life-line now, with the helicopter service." He laughed, "And no frequent ferries like to the Isle of Wight from the mainland."

She looked up to him, standing beside him at the wheel. "Trying to daunt me? Are you afraid I'll find it too cut-off? That I'll pack my bags and off?"

He took time to reply to that, his eyes intent on their direction. "No. I don't think that's my reason. You said you were used to spending school holidays in outlandish places, but this is the ends of the earth you know. Beyond New Zealand just the South Pole. Solitude can be frightening. I wouldn't judge you harshly if you found it a bit much. It's fearsome."

Georgina said, "There are worse things than solitude. It can be you prefer it to uncongenial company. And even in Italy, it was possible sometimes, to be afraid." She controlled a shiver just as he glanced at her. There was curiosity in it but at that moment the aunts came

over, eager to get her first impressions. Suddenly it all shimmered and danced before Georgina's eyes. That was because they had tears in them. Here in the sweep of this symmetrical bay Cluny, dear Cluny, should have grown up, have been a loved child, one of many perhaps. Possibly a brother who, in turn, would have owned South Horizon.

The hills on each side of the indented curve were so symmetrical save for a cliff westward that dropped sheer to the lake. That must be the Echoing Cliff, the one Ellen had named. They would point it out to her. She'd pretend never to have heard of it. But as features like this were mentioned, they would link up in her memory of the stories Cluny had repeated, and which she had learned at her mother's knee. How tragic that beauty like this should have been overshadowed by Hannah's implacable hatred.

There was a wide shore-line, ridged in an odd sort of way. Sarah said, "That shows the differing levels of the lake in times past. And even recently in times of phenomenal rain when every hillside

drains its waters down." The little jetty was painted bright scarlet on its rails. "A good landmark for helicopters. That's why the outhouses have red roofs too. Now you can see the estate more clearly. See how the houses follow the shore line, even curving a little back. The ones up the hill are the ones for the married couples, and the long line of windows with the hitching-rail in front of the verandah is the shearers' quarters and the cookhouse."

Georgina had managed to blink back those betraying tears and all at once it seemed to her as if she had always known this scene. To the left was the older homestead, which she knew from the aunts' description. To the right, on a slight angle, was the smaller one, though not really small at that. It was a trifle haphazard in its architecture. It incorporated the first cottage Ewen and Isabella had had built, stone quarried from the hill behind it, and added to by George, using what ever materials he could use. Georgina was glad the stone had never been white-washed. It fitted into the landscape so beautifully. Only

the sills were gleamingly white, with red geraniums splashed against them. Even the top storey had two levels, a couple of dormers in the higher bit. Oh, how Cluny would love the photos she would take back. A verandah ran the whole width and at one end a slanted leanto roof was joined to the wall where, she knew, Ellen had kept her treasured potplants, the ones that wouldn't survive outside when the mountains were blanketed in snow. Even at this distance you could see the coloured blurs behind the glass that denoted flowers.

The garden was already showing the first signs of spring with a transparency of blossom on one or two trees, "And the daffodils will be in bud, longing to burst open," said Eleanor.

Seth signalled their approach with a loud hoot and there was instant response; out from a big woolshed raced men, dogs barked, doors of the cottages opened, out poured children and a woman with a toddler in her arms, another at her side. Georgina said, half to herself, "It really is a higgeldy-piggeldy house, isn't it? I love it."

Seth said, "It is. I suppose the aunts told you."

She turned away from him a little because this moment belonged only to Ellen, the great-grandmother of whom she had only the one memory, the old lady who had been dancing the two-year-old Georgina on her knee, and saying that jiggly rhyme:

"There was a crooked man who
walked a crooked mile,
He found a crooked sixpence beside
a crooked stile;
He had a crooked cat who caught a
crooked mouse
And they all lived together in a
crooked house."

Ellen had said to her, "I lived in a crooked house once, darling, long ago, way over the sea. Only we didn't call it the Crooked House, we called it the Higgeldy-Piggeldy House because it was all bits and pieces. We loved it very much, your great-grandfather and me. And your mother, my granddaughter, was sweet enough to call you after him,

because we weren't given long enough to have a son of our own."

It had made a great impact on the small Georgina because there had been in the old lady's voice, something she now recognized for nostalgia. That memory must never fade.

They came about, tied up, and a lot of hugging was going on. Georgina thought it sweet when one of the single men, hugging both Eleanor and Sarah said, "The place hasn't been the same without you." News of the patients was exchanged and they began to unload the luggage. A Land Rover was awaiting that.

They left Seth and Georgina to walk up. Seth had said, as pleasantly as if he had never resented her intrusion into their lives, "I want to show Georgina the layout of the garden and the approach to it as we go."

As they started the walk across the sealed path over the shingle, Seth laughed. "The aunts have been going on as if they wanted to sell you the place. I know it's beautiful, and never more so on a day like this, but I'd better

warn you it's not always this way. Mount Serenity can be blanketed with snow even when it's not winter, but when it is, all these other mountains are covered, and the wind that comes off them, even if the sun is shining, is razor-edged. Your face can be so cold it's hard to frame words and the sheep on the lower slopes are in danger of smothering and we have to snow-rake . . . dig them out and get them to sunnier faces. We always lose some. These days, though, we have helicopters dropping hay and sheep-nuts. It's been an unusually mild winter this year, with far too little rain or the garden wouldn't be as advanced as this. We often get a late fall. You mightn't be so entranced then."

Her tone was equally dry. "I think you've forgotten that my brother and I once joined our parents in Alaska. Not that Alaska is all snow, as some imagine, but it so happened it was when we were there. I know you feel I'm just another disruption at a very awkward time when you're dying to get back to normal routine. You probably feel I'll be distracting Eleanor and Sarah with what

must hardly appear to you an urgent task, but it's dear to their hearts and I'll give it all I've got. And to lessen the nuisance of having me around I'll help as much as I can, in this emergency. And I'll help with the chores too. It may delay what I came for somewhat, but don't worry, I shan't stay any longer than I have to, once Linda is back and can cope with the schoolroom again." He didn't reply to that.

Presently he said, in a very even tone, "I think I ought to put you straight about something. I may have thought my aunts crazy when I first heard about this idea. I mean to bring someone thirteen thousand miles to write up a family history, but it isn't to say I don't want it done. With centennials, then an anniversary of one hundred and fifty years of colonisation cropping up, this is always being done, but usually with a family member doing it. Someone who has learned these stories from grandparents, had the epic stories of the early struggles passed down from generation to generation. I felt the whole idea of bringing you out here struck a wrong note. But since you've told me

you did just the same for a family with a different language, of which you had only a smattering, I feel if anyone from overseas could do it, you'd be the one, even if not quite as someone connected with the family might have done it."

She swallowed. *Not connected with the family.* It hurt. She hadn't expected that. Seth continued, "But you needn't feel unwanted. That would be horrible. I should know. My stepfather had no son, and Eleanor and Sarah had only girls. They could have resented me falling heir to this estate, their brother's stepson, but they never did. Robert and Henry were left shares, of course, but the lion's share came to me. And they made my mother very warmly welcomed to the family. She came here, a young widow with three children, as the governess, and married the owner. They have always loved her. She taught their children of course."

"Mother had been widowed so long I never thought of her as deserving and needing a life of her own. It also satisfied a dream of my stepfather's, to have someone to leave it to, seeing there were no other descendants of the Macpherson

family. I was a substitute — which was fitting. The Hebrew meaning of my name is substitute or compensation. What are you doing, Georgina?"

She was scrabbling in her shoulderbag. "I like that. I'm jotting it down. It gives meaning to this set-up."

He guffawed. "Surely you could've jotted it down when we reach the house. Couldn't you tuck it away in your mind?"

"No. That's one of the secrets of writing. I don't mean just recording factual things. Novelists have to do it too. If you don't jot immediately you forget, and your mind is tantalised by trying to remember something that would have added to its delight. Also, if you record it, it leaves your brain free to receive other inspirations. These things only come to a mind ready to accept the next flash."

"Well, I'm darned. I feel a great respect. I'm now seeing you as a professional, not as a — " his voice trailed off.

She said, "Don't spare me. I think you were going to say 'as an opportunist.'

Because that's exactly what you thought when we first met, wasn't it? Thought I'd been carried away by an expenses-paid trip to the uttermost ends of the earth, with a fat salary thrown in. But I won't hold it against you."

She'd finished jotting but they hadn't started to walk again and they faced each other on the slope. There was a challenge in her very stance, shoulders braced up, chin lifted, the breeze off-lake lifting the bright fringe back from her forehead. In the strong sunlight, even his heavy brows couldn't hide the amusement in his curiously light brown eyes.

He said, the laughter lines at the corners of his eyes deepening, "I did. I thought Sarah and Eleanor had gone mad, swept away with the romance of visiting the island where Ellen had been born. I had other reasons too, for distrusting y — for distrusting things, but I won't go into them now. The folk have reached the door of my house now and we're having lunch there. Though you'll have to sleep at Sarah's or Eleanor's tonight, till Mother comes home. But if you do supervise the correspondence

school lessons, the schoolroom's at the Higgledy-Piggeldy House. You've made your point. I did think they were mad but now — "

She found herself inexplicably sorry for him and suddenly laughter bubbled up in her, "But now you're stuck with me. Lead on, Oliphant of South Horizon. Let's make the best of things. It's late and I'm starving."

She was surprised at the feelings that assailed her as if she was indeed Ellen, returning, as she crossed the threshold. They went straight into the kitchen, beautifully modernised, Sarah and Eleanor chatting madly. "Prue told us she had prepared ahead. There are the makings of a salad, a cold leg of hogget, and some wild pork. Won't take a moment." Sarah was switching on an electric kettle, Eleanor flinging a checked gingham cloth on the table, and the two men opening a cutlery drawer. Seth began carving. Bowls of beetroot and coleslaw appeared.

They sat down with the eagerness of famished people, with one of them saying, "We needn't wash up, need we?

We'd like to show Georgina over this before we even take our way home."

Seth said, "You can get away to your own quarters as soon as you like. *I'll* show Georgina over this. She'll be working here most of the time, if not sleeping, and it's time you four get a bit of time to yourselves. I guess Henry and Robert have been marking off the days."

He hadn't meant it literally but the two older men looked at each other with slight embarrassment and Henry said, "That's dead right. I only noticed Rob's last week. I was glad our calendar bore the same treatment or Sarah might've thought I hadn't missed her as Rob missed Eleanor."

Georgina knew she was going to love the whole family. They were so endearing. Wonderful to think Sarah and Eleanor were her family, though distant cousins, on the Macpherson side. Would they ever know it? Only if it didn't mean Seth Oliphant thinking of her as someone who had, at the very least, a right here. But this was something she could do for her family, record their history, from the

time Ewen and Isabella had so bravely left all that was known and dear to make a new life for themselves in an unknown land, granted a remote holding on the understanding it must be stocked by a certain date.

She must be very careful not to reveal she already knew so much.

* * *

They stood the dishes in the sink. "We haven't a dishwasher. We've a very well-run generator but we still have to conserve electricity. Let's start the tour."

The ground floor had been redecorated recently and extended, with the need for updated office facilities, but at the far end by the back door, was an old-fashioned schoolroom, roomy and practical. "No need to be alarmed by any of this. As you can see by what's set out the lessons are all arranged and sent to us. It's mostly a matter of supervision, with the basics of teaching mastered, and the radio sessions are invaluable. However, as I sprung this on you in a rather high-handed way at the hospital, I guess *I'll* have to take it if

what it meant to them. I think their mother, Laura Macpherson, must have told them so many stories of how she loved Ellen, they felt they knew her too. And now, I'm being an opportunist and taking advantage of the fact that you've taken training as a teacher and are willing to supervise the lessons. There are three school-age children on the estate, and one mother has two toddlers besides, so can't help." He put out his hands and took her by the shoulders. She felt the warmth and strength of him right through her jacket. "Perhaps I imputed all sorts of wrong motives to you — about you coming such a distance and paying your own fare, as if there was something else in it for you I couldn't understand."

She held her breath for a moment but dare not look away, seem evasive. That suspicion could be revived and was near the truth. She managed, "What on earth could there be? It was a chance to see a part of the world Dad had never been to. I suppose with so many holidays in strange places I leapt at it, whereas a stay-at-home girl mightn't have. Don't worry, I'm here to do a job and while

this incident has delayed it a little, the task itself may not take as long as you fear. You did say all the relevant papers are here, saving time delving into county records. I'll do what I came for and depart leaving scarcely a shadow on the horizon. Excuse the pun. It was accidental."

His hands dropped from her shoulders. He said abruptly, "Let's go upstairs." There was his bedroom, with one wall all books and another maps. She liked that. His mother's had the double bed she had shared with his stepfather, a modern one; a twin guestroom, a single one that Prudence had prepared for Georgina with thoughtful care. A few sprays of an early japonica in a tall vase, New Zealand and English magazines on the bedside table, and a quite choice small desk that had probably been moved in from another room, paper and notebooks at the ready. She said, "Oh, I do wish your mother was here right now."

But as they came out into the hallway, she had a sense of disappointment. That modern furniture in the large double room hadn't given Georgina the sense

of nearness to her great-grandparents she had expected to find. It had been silly to imagine it wouldn't have been altered . . . other generations had left their mark on it, naturally, but she had thought, even so, she might have got some vibes at knowing these were the windows they had looked out from, the views they must've loved, but she had felt nothing.

As she turned to the stairs Seth caught her arm, "Not so fast. There's this. The best of all." He opened a door she had taken for a linen press one. "This was George and Ellen's room."

Georgina became very still. On the bed was a patchwork quilt, beautifully made. Old. Georgina blinked. It was familiar . . . in a flash she recalled why. Cluny had in her possession several articles of her mother's exquisite needlework, embroidery, crochet, hairpin work, and patchwork, but this, in its patches, was exactly identical with the handkerchief sachet Cluny had given Georgina long ago. Ellen wouldn't have had room to take the quilt when she fled, but she had taken, evidently, her piece-bag. She

stared, fascinated.

Seth noticed. "Mother loves it. Says there is a story in every patch."

They crossed to the bed. Georgina was glad to look down on it so he shouldn't see her eyes were dewy. She put a hand out to touch it, caressingly. "I suppose it may have faded a little but how colourful it still is. I love this rich red with the tiny white flowers on it. That grey silk, I fancy, they called dove-grey, and see, it's got a self-toned pattern on it, of tiny feathers. What a glorious mixture of colours, each so tiny, octagon-shaped and held together with such fine feather-stitch. What hours of work."

He touched a piece of ivory watered-silk. "We believe, though not sure, these were pieces left over from Ellen's wedding-dress from that long-ago ceremony on the Isle of Wight."

She knew it was. She touched some corded silk that formed a foil for the other colours because it was black. "This could have been from the very stock George might have worn. The men did then, for formal occasions."

Seth laughed, and gestured at the other

wall, "You won't be able to tell from that portrait, will you? His beard hides most of his chest."

The sun was shining right upon them, bringing them to life. Georgina was glad to go across to them, somehow terrified her thoughts would be mirrored in her eyes. For this was the bed where Cluny had been conceived, where their joy, unconfined because at last the jealous Hannah was no longer sleeping one wall away from them, had found its truest expression. This would be the room where, after so long a time of disappointments, Ellen would have told George they were to have a child. This room, for Georgina, held an aura of happiness.

These portraits were surprisingly well done considering they had been painted by an unknown artist travelling round the little-known area in those days. He had posed them so that, hung as they were, they seemed to face each other and were faintly smiling as if they had liked the idea.

Till Seth's mother had mentioned it, Georgina hadn't even known George's

hair was as fiery as her own. And for sure his eyes were the same grey. There, she supposed, the likeness would end for the fine red beard was certainly a luxurious one. She wondered if he had a chin like hers.

She peered closely; he wore an old-fashioned jacket with narrow silk revers to it, and a high-collared white shirt showing above . . . She turned to Seth. "You can, after all, see his tie, just a glimpse. See, it's the pale dress tartan of the Macphersons. Just a narrow strip they wore then."

Seth said, "You sure do your homework well . . . you'd studied up the clan history and tartans even before you left."

Georgina told herself she must be more careful. She turned to Ellen's picture. In the brief memory she had of her, her hair had been snow-white, so that the lively brown eyes had looked almost black against it, but in this her hair was as glossily brown as a thrush's wings and these younger eyes were radiating happiness. The dress, to Georgina's delight, with its little lace inset, stiffened with whalebone, was the

very one Cluny had loaned the museum once when they were having an exhibition of late Edwardian days.

She turned to the man watching her and he said, "A good idea to keep the best to the last, wasn't it? I believe the atmosphere of this room has got you."

She turned from him quickly, crossed to the window, where the blue-green waters of the lake shimmered and danced.

"Yes. It is sheer inspiration. There has to be that, even when you are recording factual things. Thank you, Seth Oliphant."

She crossed again to her great-grandfather's portrait, standing back from it, studying it. She said, "In many old portraits the men looked much older, staid, formal. He doesn't, does he? The impression is one of vitality."

There was no animosity in the look Seth gave her. "I believe you are the right one for here. You've summed up George as he is remembered. I was afraid you might portray him as a spineless sort, under his mother's thumb. Couldn't blame anyone for thinking that. It took

a strong nature to stand up against the redoubtable Hannah, yet he did just that. Imagine the furore when he said he was building a separate house! I believe there was a ding-dong go. Little Laura knew. He said he knew it would cost money but that seeing she didn't have the decency to knock on even their bedroom door, he wanted privacy for himself and his wife. She was meaner than second skimmings, that woman."

"Oh, what a descriptive phrase, I must copy it down." She paused, said, "I must draw Hannah from all angles, though. When this dislike of her has lasted through the years, she must've been hateful, but she could sound overdrawn. What had made her like that? A hard upbringing? Was she plain, even ugly?"

"She wasn't ugly. She was a very handsome woman. There are photos in existence. That is if you can admire an imperious arrogant air. They're in one of the trunks."

As they left the room she went to close the door. He said, "No, leave it. You

must come and go as you please. This room contains the very spirit of the era, for those chapters."

And, thought Georgina, it's the room where my roots are.

4

LESS than a week later life at South Horizon dropped into a routine entirely different from what Georgina had anticipated. She slept at Sarah and Henry's because that was nearer the Higgeldy-Piggeldy House and the schoolroom. Seth ate with them except for breakfast which he got himself and Georgina found herself fitting into a schoolroom attitude with surprising ease.

The correspondence lessons were excellently organised and to her amazement Sarah and Eleanor left her completely alone in school hours. Seth didn't; he looked in from time to time, intent, she suspected on making sure she kept discipline and didn't wander from the set lessons: Any extra-curriculum stuff she thought might benefit them she kept for after-school hours and was sure to let it appear entertaining.

Andrea was ten, Linda's oldest, Carl

eight, and Beth and Doug Moore's schoolager, Guy, was six, so the lessons were varied and despite a few tremors the first day, Georgina found all her old skills came flooding back.

This day she'd had the youngsters outside for a vigorous ball-game when the schoolday finished at two. They started early so that here, where mountains could cut off the westering sun, they had plenty sunshine, especially now. After a breathless hour they went back inside where she poured them lemonade and set out biscuits, carefully rationed. Andrea said, "Let's get at that funny way of enjoying history now, Georgina. You said it was fun. How?"

They retreated to the back of the schoolroom where an ancient carpet square covered the floor and battered toys of varying generations were scattered, a chipped rocking-horse and a huge home-made wooden railway engine that was loved best of all because it was so foreign to this lake-access farm. They flung themselves down on old cushions, propped chins on hands and stared at Georgina as she brought over a shabby

book, put it down on a chair and sat down with them.

She said to Guy, "If you find this boring, you can play with the Lego," and was pleased to hear that sturdy-spirited warrior say, "No fear. This could be 'portant to me too. I mightn't be up to history yet like these two" glaring in their direction, "but when I'm their age this might be my fav'rite subject and if I start sooner I'll be way ahead of them later on."

Georgina was glad the others didn't squash him flat or laugh. They merely shrugged. She said, "That's a well-thought-out idea, Guy. This notion came to me when Andrea said she found it hard to recall dates. Now, actual dates don't have to be hammered into you these days, but it's interesting to be able to sort history into periods. Into groups of years when certain things happened. Into centuries and parts of centuries.

"My grandmother got us remembering things like that by fitting these events into our own lives, but more especially into the lives of forebears. We were to remember when things took place,

what they were doing at the very time. Things like when her own mother was born, in Victoria's reign, the depression of the eighteen-eighties was going on, and that a much older brother was born eighteen-seventy-seven on the very day Alexander Bell launched his first telephone company. We couldn't imagine a world without a phone and Humphrey made her laugh by saying, 'How could the father call the doctor then?' and got such a shock to know that someone had to go for him. You'd be more knowledgeable than that about here because when you did your project for the Correspondence School on the early days here, you knew a midwife had to be brought over in the whale-boat.

"My grandmother herself was born in World War One. She somehow made us feel as if history had happened only yesterday. She'd mention French names still common on the Isle of Wight from the time of the Revolution when so many people fleeing from France settled on our island and Jersey and Guernsey. It made it so interesting to us then to look at some of our schoolmates with

those names and realize they were part of history too. Here in this country you're quite lucky, because though the history of European settlement is not quite within living memory, some older folk you know, can remember those tales told them by pioneers. When Ewen and Isabella rowed their whaleboat over here to start this estate, it was the very year Abraham Lincoln took office as President of the United States and their Civil War broke out. It was also the year that the Prince Consort died, Albert, the Queen's loved husband."

Guy said in an awed tone, "Gee . . . and you remember all those things. I don't reckon I'll be a teacher after all. I couldn't."

Georgina laughed. "I don't carry all those things in my head Carl, but I look them up when I need to, like now. It's easy to remember things about your own family though. When I wanted to link them up with South Horizon happenings, I checked with the very good reference books on these shelves, but some in this."

She reached up and brought down

the tattered book from the chair. It had a backing of old-fashioned linen-paper, brown with black printing on it, and across the top was printed: 'Price one Shilling. A British Chronology comprising 10,000 events in English History with Copious Index.'

"What's one shilling?" asked Andrea.

Georgina grinned, "I'm only just getting used to your currency . . . um, about ten cents. But when this was published ten cents or a shilling would have bought a lot more than it does now. It came out in 1892 when the Panama Canal hadn't been completed so sea-distance between Britain and here were much longer. Events are recorded in here from B.C. 56."

"I shall never be able to remember all those," said Guy in tones of deepest woe. Georgina hugged him. "I should say not. If you had a memory like that you'd be a freak and there'd be no need for books like this. But you'll link up with the periods you need to remember with the lives of your forebears. And just think how lucky you are to have lived now. In a couple of hundred years, children will

have much more to remember. Now, this is meant to be a fun thing, so let's start."

Andrea fingered the book with care. "Where on earth did you get it, Georgina?"

Georgina said in a voice she managed to keep steady, "It belonged to my great-great-grandfather in the Isle of Wight. He gave it to his son-in-law. It wasn't new then. And it was handed down to me and Humphrey. I'm always meaning to take it to a good book-binder and see what can be done about preserving it without sacrificing any of the adverts in the pages just inside the cover. Some are listed as fever cures and lung healers. One even says, to scare people into buying them: 'Do not untimely die!' And at the back it lists a set of the Waverley novels by Sir Walter Scott, saying, 'magnificently illustrated at only seven-and-six.' She added hastily, "Seventy-five cents."

Guy said loudly, "When I go back home I'm gonna ask Mum if we've any books belonging to my great-great-grandfather."

"Well done, Georgina!" said a voice from the doorway. Seth's. "You've not

only hooked the kids, you've hooked me. May I see that book?" With him came the odour of the outdoors, tussock, pasture, and, it must be admitted, sheep. Georgina found she was beginning to like the odour of sheep.

He picked up the book, flicked a few pages over. "You mustn't delay the binding of this too long, you know."

She nodded. "I must see to it as soon as I get back home."

Guy looked up, his hand was on her knee, his face that still had an endearing babyhood chubbiness about it, close to hers. "Aren't you staying here for good?" He looked quite distressed. Georgina said, "Well, my home is over there. My mother and father and brother, most of the time."

Guy said mulishly, "I thought this was your home now."

She laughed. "Home is where the heart is, they say," and looked up to take the book from Seth and their eyes met. She looked down again quickly. Why she didn't know. She only knew she couldn't sustain his gaze.

He said, "It wouldn't be an easy task

for even an expert, to preserve that printing on the cover though they have some good transparent stuff now. Oh, look, the first page is stuck to the cover with invisible tape. I wonder why?"

She took it from him, terrified he might prise it up. "Possibly my brother did it when he was using it, to hold it together."

He nodded. "I just wondered what adverts that hid." She said lightly, "An ad for a magazine called Sylvia's Home Journal, costing sixpence per month. Nothing interesting."

Nothing interesting! How wise she had been to use that clear tape. Otherwise he would have seen: 'William Somers to his son-in-law, George Macpherson' and underneath that, 'from Cluny Edwardes to her granddaughter, Georgina Cluny Innes, with love.'

She'd had to bring it with her. It was invaluable in her work, and she'd had this strange feeling George might have been glad to know, if the loved dead could know these things, that it had come back once more to the Higgeldy-Piggeldy House.

Seth said, "I'm taking the Land Rover over the river and along the other side. I don't think you've been there yet. I thought the kids could come too. I told Ken I might and asked Beth as I came past their house. How about it?"

She sprang up. "Fine by me. We've done our preliminary work on making history live and I'd like some fresh air."

"You'll get that. I want some help inspecting culverts higher up and if any stones are blocking them, I want them rolled away. They're a menace if we get a cloud-burst, which we could do, after this unprecedented dry spring."

They piled in. Georgina felt an exhilaration that was to do with being away from the schoolroom, she supposed. What else could it be?

The children raced ahead as they clambered up the first gully. He gave her a hand over the roughest places, said, "You've not only got the children going on this forebear-cum-history lark, you've intrigued me too. I'm madly trying to remember what *my* crowd were doing at the time of the French Revolution and again when Prince Albert died. I grew up

in Dunedin and knew my grandparents on my father's side and one of mothers. Both lots came out some time after the pioneers and I know a bit about the area they came from in Scotland and had a fleeting visit there, but now I have a yen to know more; to have them people my life. At times like the 1715 rising and the 1745."

Georgina said, "They were ardent Jacobites, of course, the Oliphants, and because of that they were attainted after the '45. I suppose you know that the famous Scottish poetess, Carolina Oliphant, Lady Nairne, who wasn't born till 1766, was named for the Bonnie Prince?"

"Good grief! Fancy you knowing as much as that. I knew Carolina was an Oliphant name, because I asked my grandfather once, when I was just a schoolboy, who my sister Carolina was named after. I knew her twin, Josephine, was called after our Aunt Jo, Mother's sister. I wish I'd asked him more. I guess it's because you've worked in the genealogical section."

She laughed, pausing for breath on

the rise. "Don't credit me with such efficiency. It was sheer curiosity. When you arrived to see what on earth your aunts were up to, I had a vague recollection of doing some research for another Scots-descended client called Oliphant and simply looked up a standard book on clans and tartans. I'm no expert, just a gleaner of trifles. I think the children are getting too far ahead and Guy's ambition to prove he's as good as the older ones can lead him into danger. How is it, Seth, that despite such a dearth of rain, these streams seem to me to be running more freely than when we arrived?"

"The snow-melt's beginning. Won't be long before we hear the roar of avalanches back in. That's late too, this year. Nothing near here. But that's why this job is imperative now. The other men have gone up to the culverts near Number One Hut. Tomorrow they'll go up further, stay the night there and work down. They take the four-wheel drive truck so far. The rest's climbing. We take the horses only on the lower slopes and valleys leading back in, I'm joining them

tomorrow but Henry's staying down. He can go round the sheep, it's near lambing."

Georgina was aware of a strange feeling. As if, somehow, she was losing support. How stupid, Sarah and Eleanor and Henry were stalwarts. This was a pleasant interval, just herself, Seth, the voices and laughter of the children intermingled with the lark high in the sky, so reminiscent of England; the new sound of a bellbird chiming over the song of the streams, from its perch in a *kowhai* tree nearby, the New Zealand equivalent of a laburnum; the baaing of, literally, thousands of sheep on a score of hills looking down on the iridescent waters of the Lake of the Kingfisher. Had George and Ellen climbed here as they were climbing now, doing the same rolling-away of stones, glad to be away from Hannah's jealous eye? Of course they must have. She felt at one with them.

Next day the hospital rang to say the patients were progressing well. There were no complications and they were mastering the art of walking on crutches,

and if the South Horizon folk could manage it, they could come home in two days' time. Georgina took the call, said she was almost sure they could do it and in answer to their questions said, "Linda's house is a bungalow and there's one bedroom downstairs here for Mrs. Macpherson. Will you put whoever calls for them wise as to the routine they must follow, how much rest, exercise, and so on? From what I've heard they have boundless energy that may need to be curbed."

On the men's return Seth decreed that Ken, Linda's husband, must be kept near the bungalow and he was sure his mother would want to be in her own home, not with one of the aunts. He said, "She'll need some help only a woman could give, though. Would you be prepared to do that, Georgina? Move over to the Higgeldy — Piggeldy House?"

She nodded. "I'm here now except for sleeping because of the schoolroom. We'll manage."

He pulled a face. "I bet you didn't count on having to pitch in to all this when you first fancied a trip to New

Zealand. It's a far cry from Naples and the sort of situation there, with a staff to free you to do what you were engaged to do. I've heard the children asking you about it. Sounds plutey. I'll get Sarah to bring our meals over, though, can't expect you to be a regular dogsbody. I wonder what Marius would think about all this." She looked at him, surprised by the chagrin in his voice. At least that's what it sounded like. "Marius would say it was typical of me, that I've a knack of landing in unusual situations. He'd chuckle. I wasn't just living the high life there, you know, and there were — well complications. Not all was sweetness and light. A few things seemed outlandish to me."

He looked at her intently. "I can't associate life in Italy with all its romance and history as outlandish. I had only a short visit to Florence, Venice, Rome, because my time wasn't by any means my own, but I can't imagine anything more different from here. Oh, when you said complications, did you mean trouble with the family? Because you were English?"

"No, far from it. They wanted me

to stay on. But it so happened that working as I was with history, recent and not so recent, wasn't all on the lighter side. Look at this . . ." she waved towards the water below them, sparkling like a many-faceted jewel, "All peace and tranquillity, with Mount Serenity presiding over all, a mountain so well-named. This has never been torn by war, Seth. Oh, I guess many husbands and sons and fathers from Ludwigtown left their homes to fight in two wars, even three, not theirs, and all honour to them, but they've never seen homes destroyed, carnage, priceless treasures vandalized. Italy suffered for centuries, didn't it, carved up and divided, then unified? Things still happen because of that. There are still undercurrents. But they are dear people, warm-hearted, passionate."

She stopped and colour, carnation-bright, rushed up into her cheeks. "Oh, I'm sorry. I sound as if I'm on a soapbox. Or as if I've taken offence. I didn't mean to. I don't know how we got into this, really."

He said in a strange tone. "I backed you into that position and oughtn't to

have done. Maybe I misjudged you. I thought you'd be appalled by all this and I somehow resented it. Don't for Pete's sake fly off the handle at me, Georgina, but I was guilty, at first, of thinking you'd come here to feather your nest in some way. As if the rewards that came your way from the Salvatores might have led you to think, to expect, something comparable. There I've confessed. Have I made you angry?"

She raised her eyes to his. "No-o you haven't, you beast, because you've completely disarmed me by admitting I've a right to be angry. What I did in Italy enriched my whole life. It didn't take a bonus to make me feel that way. I didn't want it. They insisted. It was enough of a bonus to know Marius.

"Seth, you're making too much of the fact I won't take a salary. I think it sticks in your crop. I said I was looking at it as a holiday and that's the way it's going to stay. I'm quite happy to help out in the schoolroom. So what? I'll look back on this time with pleasure especially now when I don't have to feel any longer that I'm unwelcome."

He scowled. "No, you certainly don't have to feel that now. This time we've got the bonus. And even though I'm no Macpherson by blood, I do want its history recorded."

"Fine. That'll spur me on once Linda returns to the school duties. Now, come and advise me on how much of your mother's things we should bring downstairs. And of course I'll do the meals. That way I don't feel a burden to Sarah and Eleanor."

"Right. Thanks. Clothes and make-up and books. She's a great re-reader. We all are here. We often run out of library books. Will you come over to Ludwigtown with me? Be a change for you."

"I certainly won't. I've caught up well with the lessons, but still get a bit nervous about whether I'm coping properly."

He grinned. "Can't imagine you nervous."

She didn't grin back. "How little people know of anyone else. I'm not self-sufficient, Seth Oliphant. I had butterflies in the stomach that first morning. Either Sarah or Eleanor should go with you. I'm

a stranger to your mother."

"I'll take them both. Glad we've had this talk. Mother would be most distressed if she thought I'd made you less than welcome. The aunts of course would've torn my liver out."

While he was away Georgina found herself dwelling on one part of the conversation, that he'd thought she had come here to feather her own nest. Why on earth should he have thought that? What could have occasioned it? But that was exactly what he would think if ever he found out who she was. Would he ever believe she only wanted to touch hands with the past, to see the scenes her great-grandmother had seen and loved. She mustn't get the shakes about it. Who would dream, after all these years, that George might have left a descendant?

It must be enough for her to know the earlier history and to be the one to record it. The distant Macpherson cousin, had taken over when Hannah had been struck down by a stroke the year after George's death, quite unknown to Ellen, and had served this property well, through bad times and good. No complications from

the past must ever arise. Why then did she have this ache of deep regret? Was it regret? She shut her mind on that. Don't analyse. It wasn't, it *couldn't* be a longing to stay. Georgina went over the homestead brook to pick the first daffodil blooms. Had Ellen planted them?

* * *

When Prudence Macpherson came home on crutches she seemed to bring laughter and light with her, from the very first moment she made an awkward exit from the Land Rover Seth had lifted her into, swung herself on to the crutches and said, "Nothing of 'home the conquering hero comes' about me. Not a triumphal march — trust me!"

Her son said, "My dear Mama, how anyone daft enough to attempt what you did could expect to be hailed a hero beats me. It was clean mad!" Her laughter rang out, as joyous as a girl's. "But done with the best of intentions, you unchivalrous hound!"

"Well, remember what the road to hell

is paved with . . . watch where you're putting those crutches, I swept most of the stones off yesterday but — "

"But I must be allowed to gloat over the advance in my garden. Those grape hyacinths are like a deep blue ribbon and the primroses behind aren't a bit delayed by the fact I divided them far too late. Georgina, how glad I am you're here, otherwise I'd have been made to stay at the other house and after their globetrotting, Robert and Henry deserve to have their wives to themselves. Now, no twittering about they'd love to have me. I'm positive Georgina won't find me too much of a burden because I'll be able to help her with the history."

Her undutiful son groaned. "I suppose you realize everyone — and I repeat everyone — has the same idea and there'll be so many versions of the old tales and legends dished up, the poor girl won't know what's fiction, what's fact or, at the most charitable, recognize some details for heavily embroidered and romanticized accounts."

Georgina swung round on him. "Don't dare say that. It'll never be a readable

history if everything's made too matter-of-fact. I don't want exaggeration but I don't want it made so prosaic that it's just a bald tale of pioneer hardship and determination. If two accounts differ greatly I'll just put: 'as told by so-and-so.' and quote both."

Prudence, green eyes sparkling, said, "Georgina, you're a girl after my own heart. If I had a hand free I'd clap. Through all the early life at Horizon there was romance and true love. Except when the detestable Hannah married into the family. You know what George said in his diary: that when Ellen came into his life the world took on new colour. Hannah was an upstart, a false note. Thank heaven that sour nature died with her."

They wouldn't guess that was like a blow in the face to one listener. Hannah's strain hadn't died out. As far as she knew not a single one of George's descendants, his daughter, his granddaughter, his great-granddaughter and great-grandson had a trace of her bitterness and possessiveness. They'd been brought up on the other side of the world away from that grim

personality, in love. How right Ellen had been to flee.

Seth said, laughing, "Come on, Mother. Those crutches will grow roots if you don't move. Georgina has a delectable afternoon tea ready. I bet that by now, Linda and family are halfway through theirs. You're going into your favourite chair with your feet on Ellen's footstool."

Georgina hadn't dreamed at first, how every little thing would seem connected with Ellen, or how she'd long each time to get Cluny here to see them. Ellen had brought her diaries with her and before Cluny had gone off for this year in Florida with her half-brother and sister and their families she had put them for safe keeping in her bank in Cowes.

Georgina knew many entries by heart. In one Ellen had written: 'It's such a delightful secret. All our own as yet. We talk about it all the time. It's so sweet of George not to mind if it's a son or daughter. Some estate owners get set on having a boy. But every child should have a true welcome. I wonder if it's silly of me to be glad this child was conceived here in our very own house.'

I'm so thankful I'm not suffering with morning-sickness which would make our secret harder to keep these first few weeks. I just get a little nausea first thing. George brings me up a cup of tea and some thin bread and butter and it's gone. Of course we can't cherish our secret for long. Anyway, it wouldn't be fair to Hannah. My baby will be, after all, her grandchild. I pray it may mellow her. I wanted to laugh last week when she once more twitted me on my barrenness. What an old-fashioned cruel word. Though at least she didn't repeat that jibe of last year when the MacQueens brought over a visitor, a great strapping wench of a girl. When they'd gone George's mother said, 'And if the MacQueens hadn't taken it into their heads to get George to accompany old Margot on that trip to Britain, George might have married her. What sons *she* would have borne.'

"I said, 'Possibly, providing he'd asked her to marry him,' and added: 'I'm not going to tell George that but don't ever say it again or I will. I'm trying so hard not to come between a mother and son. I can't see the need. My own mother

welcomed my brother's wife as another daughter. George doesn't love you any the less for loving me.'

"What a strange woman. She looked at me with cold, bitter eyes and said 'You're always laughing together. And I don't know what about. I'm sure it must be about me.'

"I felt an immense pity for her. I caught at her hands, 'But why should we laugh at you? We laugh at the silliest things. We sometimes remember funny things the shepherds or their wives say and we can't help laughing. Please, please don't ever think we laugh at you.' Hannah shook my hands off. Later that night George had one of his rare arguments with his mother so she thought I *had* told him."

Prudence was touched when she found Georgina had made up a stretcher-bed in the small room they called the Little Parlour with a door leading into that bedroom so Georgina could go to her in the night if needed. Prudence was so young-hearted. Indeed, she was only fifty-six. She said one day when they were alone. "I was always sorry I couldn't give

Stephen the son he deserved, to inherit this place. He had no children by his first wife, who was a wonderful person. He really looked on Seth as his son, and was only too thrilled to know he would carry on. This place is in Seth's blood as if he had been."

Georgina, at the sink, said, "Perhaps Seth will have sons and might even give them Macpherson as their second names."

"He could easily. But he'd better hurry up. He's nearly thirty-two. He's had the odd fancy but nothing serious. What a tragedy Ellen loved this place so much and had to leave it. If Seth marries, I hope his wife may love it too."

Through the window Georgina saw the sparkle of the turquoise waters in the sun, the beautiful symmetry of Mount Serenity and bit back saying, "Who could help loving it?" She was glad she had. Hadn't Seth said that day in Cowes, "Hannah was not in *my* family tree thank goodness. She was just someone George's father ought never to have married. How thankful I am that none of her nature can crop out in my descendants."

It wasn't a happy memory that. Why, for goodness' sake did she feel it so badly?

The answer hit Georgina amidships . . . Because she loved South Horizon, because her roots lay here . . . because . . . *because she loved Seth Oliphant.*

5

SETH came into the schoolroom at the end of lessons one day. "I've good news for you. Linda's doing so well with just a stick and that sort of rocking-sandal, she says she can take over now from you so you can get on with the job you came for. Says we can't expect you to prolong your stay too long. How about it?"

Georgina bent over her desk, gathered up some maps and repeated: "How about it? Why I'd be glad. I'm dying to get on with the history, of course."

"And to get away?" His tone was level.

She managed to say, "That too, naturally, but I'm not thinking of the return trip yet. Impossible to set a time limit or even to estimate how long it could take till I see what records there are. For some reason, in our talks, I mean with Eleanor and Sarah and your mother, we dwell on Ellen and George and Hannah

too much. The story begins with Ewen and Isabella coming to South Horizon. I'll want the name of the ship they came on, the port they left from in Scotland. I know they arrived at Port Chalmers, near Dunedin. I hope one of them at least kept a diary of the voyage, how ever brief the entries.

"I need to catch the interest of who ever reads it in the years to come, so that they understand the anguish they must have known at leaving places familiar and dear for a new, raw land. Even if their home circumstances may have been of poverty, and perhaps harsh treatment in the years before, during the times of the clearances. What got them to the decision point to try their fortunes in a land so remote it was going to take three or four months by sailing ship, to reach here? Those books you brought from Ludwig library when you got the patients, are marvellous. I've already got the atmosphere of those voyages, the inadequate cabin conditions, the epidemics that swept the families, the burial of darling children at sea, the births, the becalmings, the sea-sickness,

the homesickness, the lack of fresh food, the more pleasant days when they sailed on. I've gleaned a lot but now I want what actually happened to Ewen and Isabella. I know they were newly-weds and that Isabella didn't have her first baby till their second year here, which was rather unusual for those days, but I really want to delve now.

"The other day Prue showed me some of those beautifully illustrated certificates her people had preserved, one even signed by the Rev. Thomas Burns, nephew of Robert Burns, who led the Church of Scotland Colony to Dunedin and I wondered if you have any of the Macpherson ones here. It made me itch to get on. Eleanor and Sarah will help me. Their mother, little Laura, seems to have been a fount of information about the years before she was born, and must've been a great story-teller. Yet she wasn't a direct descendant. How come?"

"It was because Macpherson cousins followed Ewen and Isabella out. Some settled in Ludwigtown, following the lure of the gold, one lot set up a store, and in time one or two of the sons came over

here to work. It's a shame you've not had time yet to learn all these things. Pity our busiest time is coming, but I'll lend a hand in the evenings. Just as well we lamb late here, because of it being a high-country station or we'd be into the thick of it already, like the ones nearer the coast."

Georgina looked out of the window, said, "I can understand now why you were so appalled when you knew what your impulsive aunts had landed you in. My previous experiences weren't half as complicated. I didn't really know the set-up here."

She thought his voice was rough with impatience. "Sorry you came, are you? Didn't dream it would drag on so long?"

She swung round on him, dashed the coppery hair away from her forehead. "Sorry I came? How could I be? No, I'm only sorry it's been so disrupting for you." She waved a hand towards the view, where the tossing blossom of a flowering cherry moved against the scintillating blue-green of the wind-rippled lake, and beyond the far lake-shore where the first grey foothills rose, a line of snowy peaks

against the cloudless blue sky.

Real passion underlay her indignation. "How could anyone be sorry to have seen this? To find such beauty at the bottom of the world . . . and just outside one's door? I'll always remember this when I'm back in my own little sea-girt isle. Always be glad to have seen it. It's too beautiful for forgetting."

He made a strange sound. She took it for derision, of scorn for her outburst. She choked a little, said, "It's all right for you. You've lived with it so long you don't appreciate it as I do. You think I'm just a raving female, don't you, all gush and bubble!"

What ever she expected it the way of an answer, it wasn't this. He said, in a wondering sort of voice, "What a lovely phrase, *Too beautiful for forgetting*. Did you read it somewhere? Is it a quotation?"

She wasn't sure what she felt. Perhaps deflated. Her gaze fell before his. She wished he wasn't standing so near. As she took a step back, his hands shot out and seized her, by the upper arms. "Georgina Innes! That's the very last time you are

ever to twit me with my opposition to your coming here. A pretty pickle we'd have been in if you hadn't. We'd probably have had to send the schoolkids over to Ludwigtown to friends so they didn't fall back too far with their lessons and that would've upset their mothers. You stepped into the breach very nicely and didn't complain."

She moved restlessly but his grip didn't lessen. She said, "Oh, I know you find it useful me being here but — "

He laughed. "Useful, yes, but ornamental too. You know, Miss Georgina Innes, you're quite something when you're enraged. Even your forelock has an aggressive lift to it, like a rooster's comb, and though most of the time your eyes are grey and rather cool, especially towards me, today they're as changeable as that lake out there, neither green nor blue. Very attractive!" and the next moment his lips came down on hers.

She was completely taken by surprise and hadn't a hope of freeing herself. Not that — not that — her thoughts faltered. *Not that she wanted to.*

It seemed to last a long moment. Then he let go of her arms but brought his hands swiftly down to hers. His eyes were gleaming with fun. "I dare not let you go till I get out of range. You would undoubtedly slap my face," he said, at which precise moment a small, anxious voice said from the open doorway, "Georgina, you said you'd practise some more catches with me if Mum said I could come over. She did. Come on."

Guy. What a blessing it hadn't been Andrea. Seth laughed maddeningly, said, "Good idea, young Guy, she needs some fresh air."

Guy looked surprised. "Why? It isn't hot in here."

"Not really, but she needs to cool off, just the same. Do you want me to play ball too?"

Guy was emphatic. "No fear. Three's no good. I'm coming on fine now there's just her 'n' me. I'll be nearly as good as the others soon. That'll teach them to call me butterfingers."

Georgina was glad of a nice safe topic. She said, "The others didn't realize that

when they were your age, they weren't so good at catches either. Seth, Guy and I have been practising when they're out of the way. He's really getting the knack now."

"Right on the ball you might say," said Seth.

Guy's tone was proud. "At first we threw balls to each other standing very close. She kept moving back and back and when I'd got up to fifty at quite a long way, without dropping a single one, she showed me how to move back when she threw it further. I can judge the distance quite well now. Yessir, I'm good."

"I'm sure you are, Guy. Good for you. I'd never have suspected her of such patience." His gaze flickered to Georgina, "What a prosaic end to our conversation. Never mind, we can resume it later."

"Not if I know it. It wasn't the conversation I was objecting to. As you jolly well know."

His eyes gleamed with mischief. "I didn't notice any objection to the action, really."

Her face flamed. "I think I do need

some fresh air, come on, Guy. Pick up your ball."

* * *

She was glad she was serving dinner out when they met again. "That looks good," he said. "As it's being dished out already, I'll just wash at the sink. I say, Mum, what's this? Are you off your crutches too, and on to a stick?"

"Yes, but I hope it won't be long before you take us over to get the plaster off. Isn't that a delectable pie Georgina's made?"

Georgina shrugged. "Don't raise his hopes. It's just a plain old beef mince with short pastry. Hadn't time for any trimmings."

"No, I can imagine that, with first me, then Guy holding you up."

As they lifted their first forkful Prudence said, "Guy came over here when they finished their practice. I've let him set his jigsaw out on the folding-table. He's having a hard time with the little ones at home, pulling it to pieces. He said you'd been in the schoolroom, Seth. I hope you

weren't interfering."

He sounded indignant. "Interfering? Me? Of course I wasn't. What gave you that idea?"

Prue lifted guileless eyes towards her son. "Because Guy said you were trying to stop her smacking your face. He was shocked at grownups behaving like that."

This time it was Seth's turn to redden. Georgina hadn't thought that ruddy face would show a blush. But it sure did.

She burst out laughing. Seth glared at her. "Now look what you've got me into. And how the devil can I explain it? Mother, you know what kids are. Guy just came in at the tail-end of a bit of horseplay."

Prudence looked even more mischievous. "It didn't sound like horseplay to me. I found *all* he said very interesting."

Her son got up, crossed to the mantelpiece, switched on the transistor. "We've missed the six o'clock news but I dare not miss the weather forecast."

Georgina felt it served him right. Nice to see these self-assertive and aggressive males embarrassed for once.

* * *

She expected him to retire to his office after the meal but he said, "Are you going to be in the Little Parlour tonight, Mum?"

She nodded. "Why?"

"Well, Georgina and I want to get right on to the earliest days here. In fact from when they left Scotland. I've a vague idea those papers are up in that huge tin trunk in the little room off Ellen and George's. I think it'd be a good idea if we used the extension table in there to sort out the papers into their periods and you could be a great help to us because Stephen told you so much about early conditions here. Come on up, Georgina."

Seth groaned as he lifted the lid and gazed at the contents. Georgina uttered a cry of rapture. "What treasure-trove. Sometimes you have such a scarcity of records for a foundation to build on."

"Well for sure there's no dearth here. I'm appalled."

She said crisply, "You idiot! This is any historian's dream. Don't forget this is my job. We'll sort out the dross, the

receipts and trivia from the documents and letters. Sheer gold."

"It is to you. You're positively starry-eyed. I like enthusiasm in people, though I've a sinking feeling I'm going to be involved."

"I doubt it, I work better on my own."

"Always? In Italy, for instance. Didn't Marius get involved? Though no doubt as a susceptible Italian he'd love it."

"What an odd thing to say. He was in it from the word go. It was *his* family history. I also worked closely with Miss de Carteret. But then she was free of other commitments; we weren't bothered about correspondence lessons and the approach of lambing. One consolation is, though, that with being tied to a couch at present, Prue will be right on the spot to assist when necessary."

He nodded. "I'll be glad of this interest for her. She's such a goer that she'd be as fractious as a leg-roped hog if it wasn't for this. When she married Stephen Macpherson she completely identified with his family."

They had to make trip after trip up

and downstairs. Seth said, "The most important documents are in the office-safe of course, but these very old-run-of-the mill ones aren't sorted at all." Georgina became aware he was beginning to respect her methods and conceded her the professional right to tell him exactly how to clarify them. They put a small table each side of Prue and let her do some sorting too. They ran out of paperweights and Seth departed to gather a bag of lake-stones, smooth and heavy. Presently some semblance of order emerged from the chaos.

Suddenly Seth gave an exclamation that sounded like gratification. "This is it! Well, I'm blessed. I knew I'd heard that phrase before. I thought this old sketchbook must have got lost. I daresay one of us told you Ellen was very good with her pencil. That sort of thing was part of a young lady's education in those days, of course. Look, Georgina. Remember? When you said that about the lake?"

She took the sheet he held out to her and knew apprehension. What had she said? Oh, yes, of course! There it was, a

sketch of the lake, very much the scene she'd gazed upon from the school-room window. And underneath just discernible, the title: 'Too beautiful for forgetting'. She had always known that wording, known the contours of that sketch . . . but in water-colour. Ellen must have painted it from memory. When Pierre died it had come to Cluny. She swallowed, said, "What a coincidence, that I used exactly those words." She bent to the task again.

Presently she said, "This is tantalising. I keep catching sight of intriguing references, but mustn't get side-tracked. Even from these bare bones of household accounts I feel I'm meeting Ewen and Isabella in the flesh. She's got little comments against some — one from W. G. Rees of Queenstown. Did he run a store? It says — "

"No, he was one of the first run-holders long before the gold-rush. Went through a tough time as his men deserted to prospect but he was a fine character, never let anyone due to need, fall by the way. Incidentally, he was a cousin of the great cricketer, Doctor

W. G. Grace, in fact had given the doctor his first cricket bat. They even shared the same first names. How he coped with the place being over-run by gold-seekers we'll never know, but finally he moved out to Frankton further back along the lake, where it bends along to Kingston. Named it Frankton for his wife, who was Frances. He supplied not only the gold-fields with stores but other new settlers too, taking up land. He brought goods in from Kingston at the foot of the lake. It had reached there from Invercargill. That lake, you know, as the years went by became alive with boats, not just whale-boats as at first, but paddle-boats. Later even steamers. Anthony Trollope and his wife came up here on a steamer. By then though, there were roads, of a sort, through the gorges for the return trip, though they had to push the coach through snow drifts. Of course our stuff had even further to go, it had to be portaged — overland — from Queenstown to Ludwigton. What does that docket say, Georgina?"

"Sacks of rice, tapioca, oatmeal, flour, sugar, treacle, but this is what caught

my eye. Isabella's got pencilled against it 'Manna in the wilderness.' It's for a dozen candle-moulds. She says, 'Now I can make more at a time.'" Georgina flung her hands out, "And we grizzle if the power-plant flickers, yet can flood a whole room with light at the turn of a switch."

Seth tossed her notebook across. "Get that down, it's too good to lose."

"That's not necessary. It's here, in Isabella's handwriting."

"That's not what I meant. I'd like you to record *your* reaction to that. The contrast. It'll give our family history colour and reality. No wonder you're such a success in this career. Did Miss de Carteret have any documents to work from?"

"Not as many as we could have wished. When her forebears came to the Island, they'd come out of the Gates of Paris hidden under rotting refuse in the vegetable carts that supplied the city daily. Absolute Scarlet Pimpernel stuff. They had a few precious jewels secreted on them, most fortunately, to sustain them for the first months in England. She

and I went over to France and consulted records till she got too frail. But they were copious diary-keepers from the time they got away across the Channel."

Prudence said happily, "In our off-time you must tell me all about that. I hope you were suitably rewarded. It sounds like sheer hard grind to me."

Georgina was vaguely conscious that Seth was looking intently at her. Colour rose in her cheeks. The way Miss de Carteret had wanted to reward her had been very embarrassing. She didn't like being reminded of it. She said, rather shortly, "It was just a job. I did get a trip to France out of it and was paid the usual secretarial rates. I didn't look for more."

Seth said to his mother, "I believe you're embarrassed because we're not giving Georgina a salary. The aunts tried to persuade her to that, paying for it out of that legacy from their old uncle, but she refused it. Can't think why."

Georgina said, "It's sweet of you, Prue, but we've had that out. I mean Sarah and Eleanor and myself. They've agreed. Marius gave me a big bonus.

That was for discovering some stuff they'd thought was lost for ever to the family. In ferreting out some obscure information needed, I came across a clue as to where some paintings and porcelain had been stored during the war. A happy accidental discovery. So the family rewarded me. It would have been churlish to refuse. I tried, but it hurt them and they were a wealthy family. It's given me something many girls my age would envy me for, a trip to the Southern Hemisphere. So, just as I was told by my grandmother, to accept things graciously, I would like you folk to accept my services."

Seth said, "That's twice you've mentioned your grandmother in connection with gracious acceptance. You do seem to have a good relationship with her."

"We've always been pals. She's still got a great sense of fun. Even since my grandfather died and they were so devoted."

"How old is she?"

"Nearly eighty though it's impossible to believe. She was born in World War One. In the first year."

"Did the aunts meet her? I know your immediate family is in Venezuela but — "

"No, Granny is a gadabout. She's visiting family in Florida just now. Mother flies over to see her quite often from the project. If Granny had been on her own back home I couldn't have come. She's making a long visit, vows it'll be her last."

She had an impish thought of what a stir it would cause if she said: "She's staying with Laurette and Guillaume and her name is Cluny!"

* * *

Two days later Prue was remarking mischievously, "Isn't it a good thing you've such a reliable staff, Seth, that you've been able to spend so much time inside lately!"

He grinned. "I know. I'm hooked on this. Didn't dream there'd be so many interesting titbits among this mass of papers. I thought the first Macpherson's daughter-in-law hadn't kept diaries at all, but in this old account book she's jotted

down a few personal things. Like 'I thought old Blackie, the Orpington, had died somewhere, but she appeared with fifteen chicks, far outdoing the broody hens we kept safe in the fowl-houses.' And 'Lay in bulk amount of mustard. I'm sure that's how we pulled Freddie through that bronchitis in spring.' Even things like, 'Alastair took time off to make the children a see-saw. And he's already carved one of the animals for the Christmas crib. But in secret. I'll love to see their faces.' It makes the old Colonial days come alive, doesn't it. I've marked it in red for you, Georgina."

That night, after two hours solid work, Seth said, "Mother said I was to show you the gem of these hoardings tonight, Georgina. Look at her. She thought we'd never finish. I've got the letter here, in the deed-box for safe keeping."

"What letter? And why — "

"A love-letter from George to Ellen."

"What? would there have been any? I mean their courtship was so quick. It was all within the time of old Margot MacQueen's visit, according to what you've told me. Oh, did George go

off during that time to see the sights of London?"

"No, he'd been to London before he actually met Ellen. She was distantly related to Margot's people, the Somers crowd, you know." (Georgina could've told him that). "He wrote it from Wellington. He'd been chosen to represent the Lake County in approaching Parliament on some issue. Hannah was immensely proud of that. He wrote two letters, one to his mother, that's here too, a very nice filial letter. One, to Ellen. Like me to read it to you?" He went off to get it.

Prudence said to Georgina, "We talked this over. You know we felt it was a pity that though George's tragic death and Ellen's broken-hearted return to her parents has to be recorded, it might be nice to record this, to sweeten the sting."

Seth came back, sat down by Georgina. He looked at the envelope. "Quite an historical connection. See, it's got the parliamentary seal on the envelope. It was in the first year William Massey became Prime Minister. Nineteen-twelve. Listen."

He began,

"‘Ellen, dearest and best, I’ve just realized I’ve never before had the privilege of writing you a love-letter. We had so sudden a courtship and were never parted. Not that I regret it was so brief because being wedded was so much better. I’ll never forget, before that, those enchanted weeks on that small island, so strange to me, so beautiful. My first Spring away from New Zealand and it was all an English Spring is meant to be. I can still hear the cuckoo calling in that leafy lane we picnicked in. Remember? There were cowslips under the hedges, primroses, Queen Anne’s Lace, and bluebells grew under those greening beeches that almost met overhead. Then that other day when we wandered down Shanklin Chine and you tripped and fell. That did it. I’d been telling myself that I mustn’t rush you off your feet but here you were, off your feet and in my arms and I proposed there and then. I couldn’t believe it when you accepted me, told me you were ready to leave your parents, your sisters and brothers and come to the bottom of

the world with me, where not even a road came.

"You did it so lightheartedly. Our honeymoon in Cornwall, Tintagel and the magic of re-reading the legends of King Arthur, and the utter felicity of discovering a world of two, and finding how much we had in common, a promise of happiness for all the years to come. Then the trip home. You were so sweet with old Margot. Never let her feel a nuisance even when her fragility curtailed some of the shore expeditions. It was a new world to me, Ellen, in more ways than one. It held more laughter than I'd known till then. It was on that ship I had my first desire to write up the history of South Horizon. Soon that time will be out of living memory, the times my father's mother told me about. She was a wonderful story-teller to a very lonely little boy. I wish you had known her. It's not been easy for you, dear love, but you've survived these years in spite of all. Thank you for so often turning the other cheek. If in time to come we have a family, and please God, we do,

there may be a mellowing. But even if we never do, Ellen, it's been enough just to have you and at least we have our very own home now. Time has gone. I've just been called. This has been a most interesting time. Just God be with you till I see you again. It can't be too soon,

All my love, George."

Seth turned to her when he laid the letter down. "Oh, don't cry, Georgina. The aunts and Mother did too, when we discovered it. Didn't we, Mother? I wasn't ashamed of my feelings, either. We felt it must've meant a lot to Ellen when she received it. I'll never forget the moment we found it in the hidey-hole."

"The hidey-hole? Where — ?"

"It's in the corner, the far one, of that deep, slanting cupboard under the eaves. Hannah was always prying. We found that out from what George wrote in one of his diaries. They were there too. It dated from the day Hannah was caught reading Ellen's diary. They contrived this for some privacy. They were both compulsive diary-keepers. George's run

from his schooldays that were spent here, with a governess. Hannah dismissed one because she thought her child was getting too fond of her! You'll be up to that stage soon. He had quite a turn of phrase, a born writer. Some of his entries you'll be able to incorporate into yours. All his diaries are here except the one he must've been entering in during the last few weeks of his life. We think that Ellen, in her quick, desperate flight from Hannah's rage and grief, must've taken it with her. She wouldn't have had the time to pack them all or the room for them. The Campions helped her pack some treasures. They were afraid Hannah might even do her some physical harm. Sarah and Eleanor grieved for her when we found it, that the letter had been left behind. They felt she must've searched for it frantically. We only hoped she found things in his last diary that she took with her, to compensate a little."

* * *

Georgina felt that all she knew was welling up in her. She wanted to cry out,

"Oh, yes, there were things she treasured, things we as a family still do. The entry George had made the day before he was killed for instance, had contained all the joy he had known because of their coming parenthood." She didn't know what to do. Cluny had had her letter by now announcing she was off to South Horizon for an unspecified time. There had been only one guarded reply to it, in case Georgina was careless and it fell into wrong hands, but it had carried in it a hint of wistfulness. One thing Georgina knew, that if ever it seemed to her that this family wouldn't regard Cluny and her grand-daughter as seeking any financial gain, she would tell them. She must leave a space in her first draft, in case, just in case.

* * *

She was glad when at last she was in bed, but not to sleep. Her mind seethed with ifs and buts and she found no answer to any of them. She simply couldn't predict this family's reactions. Oh, let's be honest, Georgina. You

mean Seth's reactions. Seth, the man you love. The man who was unashamedly glad Hannah's line had died out with her. The man who, in the first place, had been puzzled that any girl should take this on at her own expense. Those doubts, those 'feathering-your-nest' doubts, would return. They might even think Hannah's acquisitiveness had cropped out in her, that she'd wanted to see how the land lay, how valuable the property was. Worst of all, if there was a hostile surge, she might not be permitted to finish the history, the history of a child conceived in love and anticipated with joy, whose inheritance had never come to her.

There were other factors. In not much more than ten days ahead lambing would be upon them; Prue and Linda still had to get their plasters off. This family needed her just now. *This family? Her family.* Because Sarah and Eleanor, and Seth's stepfather, their brother, had all been kin to her even when she hadn't known it or them.

Again words of Cluny's came to her from the years when she'd been left with

her when Mother had been away with Dad. Cluny had said, "When doubts crowd in and you don't know what to do next, I think of what my mother used to say. It was: 'Do with thy might what thy hand finds to do.' It had worked for her and it worked for me. When ever I knew worries that threatened to crush me, and most lives have a share of those, or when sorrow or temptation came my way, I'd think of Mother, unwilling to put me under Hannah's domination, and with very little money beyond her ship-fare home, stealing away in Campions' boat, not knowing how her parents would view her actions, and after my birth, finding a job in days when women's pay was pitiable. She put her hand to what she found to do, if ever any one did. Then in time she met my loved stepfather. Yet I can still, in the years before Pierre came into our lives, remember her singing as she went about her work."

Warmth came up in Georgina then. The difficulty of the days ahead suddenly seemed minimised. She'd see it through, the writing of her family history. Perhaps

God would show her how to reveal her ancestry, if it became necessary. As the darkness beyond her uncurtained window paled, Georgina slid over the edge of sleep.

6

NEXT morning, Seth, unaware of Georgina's disturbed night, rang the Ludwigtown Hospital to report on the progress of the women and was told he could bring them over any time now to remove the plasters.

He turned as Georgina was clearing away the breakfast dishes, "Right . . . you heard? That means today; too near lambing to leave it longer. Mama, you and Georgina get your things together for an overnight stay. They suggested that, so if any problems crop up or they have to re-plaster, there'll be time. I'll go over and see Linda now. The aunts can look after the children. They'll love it, and it'll be a treat for the kids. Practically a day off."

Georgina said, "Where'll we stay? At a hotel or with friends? But four would be a tall order. Do you really need me?"

"Do I need you? I know better than to take these two irresponsible females

without a fellow-guardian. They've not had broken bones before and are mad enough to think once the plaster is off they can go skipping about like goats on the mountain-tops. Of course you're coming. I need moral support."

Prue pulled a face. "Might I remind you of how crackbrained you were when the plaster came off your arm a few years back? We allowed you to watch the crutching — and when a ewe broke away, Georgina, he collared it and the arm had to be set all over again."

"Traitor!" accused her son. "But it just proves I've benefited by experience. Georgina, we have an old miners' cottage across the water. It's called *The Forty-niner*. Modernized, I assure you. It's our lifeline here. A godsend to staff, always someone or other needing a night or two over there for dentist or doctor or something. Right, that's settled. I'll see Linda."

They left the two women at the small hospital, walked to the cottage, one in a street of lilliput dwellings, close to each other, strange in this country where spaces were wide and open, for these had

the sense of being huddled together like a frontier town. She said so.

He nodded. "These were bare hillsides in the gold-rush days and the winds that swept down the gorges or off the snowclad heights were razor-sharp and apart from that, this huddling-together in what was often a lawless community, with men from the four corners of the world desperate for gold and jealous of those who struck it lucky, most were glad to have others at hand. At first, this settlement didn't even have a one-cell jail. The constable used to shackle the law-breaker to a heavy log, and let him sleep on the floor of one of the drinking saloons.

"Now our riches lie in the fruit-growing of the area and in the tourist trade . . . folk still coming from the four corners. Tourist trade is phenomenal, due no doubt to over-crowding in holiday spots overseas. People looking for the unspoiled delights, last, loveliest, loneliest."

"Oh, what a lovely phrase. I must get it down."

Seth chuckled. "It's not my phrase.

It's Kipling. He said it of New Zealand.
Watch it, Georgina."

"Oh, I'll credit him with it. I think it would be out of copyright. It must be fifty years since he died. Oh, yes, I think he died just before World War Two. Oh, how fitting for here. Seth, isn't it wonderful that men and women who in some cases have been dead over hundreds of years, uttered words that live on. Like Elizabeth the First saying she might be a woman but she had the heart and stomach of a king."

They had paused at the white picket gate in the drystone wall. She laid a hand on one of the top stones as he went to open it. He paused. "You could be one of that company yourself, Georgina. What you are writing here will go into the local libraries but also up to the famous Alexander Turnbull Library in Wellington. Generations to come will read it in their time. It's so good to keep this local history alive. Especially when it's written by someone who has so identified with the ones who created South Horizon. I used to think when ever talk of having it written up was

mentioned, what a pity it was that there wasn't a descendant with a knack of words to write it, but there might never have been one with your flair for it. How odd to think someone from the very island Ellen came from should come here to do it."

Before she could answer he took a sharp look at her and said, "What is it? You've got such a strange look on your face."

She said, just controlling a shake in her voice, "I — it's just that you made me realize how much I've identified with this. I suppose I always do."

"You look as if you could do with some coffee. You've been working too hard, taking the schoolroom in your stride, looking after Mother, getting the meals. You looked quite pale then."

At which she blushed and he said, "That's better. How do you like this?"

She stopped on the uneven path of lake-stones. "It looks as if it hasn't been altered much. I like that. It's retained a rugged air."

"Rugged is the word. This was just a shanty at first, one degree better than a

tent. All these places were calico towns at first, you know, hastily erected as strike after strike occurred. This was put up by a veteran from the Californian goldfields. That's why it's called *The Forty-niner*. This front part hasn't suffered much change and adds to historic value."

He was interrupted. "This is just what I want for contrast. To catch the flavour of those days. Making the area a two-fold one. Throws into relief Ewen and Isabella's struggles to establish a pastoral holding, with the frantic efforts of the miners to win fortunes, and, I suppose in some cases to go back whence they'd come. So when did this relic come into our family — I mean the family I'm writing up," she amended hastily.

Evidently he'd not noticed her slip. He grinned, "That's what I was trying to tell you, Georgina. That old-timer acquired a partner, who married later on, and that woman, needing more cash than came from the panning, began offering accommodation, of a sort, so the additions were made, mainly at the back. Mostly bush carpentering, but time, trees, and creepers made it into

a harmonious whole. It sort of matches the Higgeldy-Piggeldy House, don't you think?

"My stepfather's father bought it when he fell heir to the place. That family used to ride round the end of the lake on horseback to spend time here, on business or for a change. It's still a godsend to us. We added rooms in two wings from the rear, leaving a sort of courtyard in the centre, and another kitchen, in case two families needed to be here at the same time for school affairs. The kids spend a week or two each term over here, good for them educationally and socially and it's good for the mothers too. They are such bricks."

It was charming in its simplicity, with a big coal range as well as an electric one, for warmth and for those times when snowfalls might interrupt power. He made the coffee, put out biscuits, sat down with her at the bare kitchen table and reverted to the former topic. "Tell me, Georgina, did you relate to the Salvatore family in exactly the same way?"

She considered it. "New Zealand is

part of the Commonwealth. We share the same language. That makes it easier to express oneself. I felt strange at first, in Italy. But not for long. They soon made me feel one of the family. Marius and I clicked. Odd isn't it, how a recognition of . . . what shall I say? Well, kinship of spirit, can leap over all barriers of race, religion, age, way of living. I was lucky."

He said, dunking a gingernut, "It sounds as if Marius was, also."

"Nicely said, Seth. I'll try to do just as good a job on the history of Horizon too." The hospital had promised to ring when the plasters were off so they pottered round the flowerbeds close to the house, tying up tall plants and deheading them. The sun poured down giving a sense of well-being and contentment. A little odd to be in such harmony with a man who had so vigorously opposed her coming. All her sleep-evading doubts of the night seemed lulled.

Prue and Linda were elated, the once-fettered limbs feeling as light as air but Seth vetoed any shopping. "It's back to the house. I'll take you shopping

tomorrow morning. You are now going to rest and Georgina and I are going to garden. I'll mow the lawns, she can cut the edges."

Prue was indignant. "I hope you asked her — are not just issuing orders in your autocratic way."

He grinned. "She proposed it so it serves the silly wench right if she would've preferred to explore the township. If you two are very good, I'll take you all out to dinner. To the *Sluicing Point*."

"Dinner?" queried Georgina. "You mean a picnic at this Point? I don't think they'd be comfortable enough."

The others laughed. "No, it's a restaurant called that. Very plutey. Our newest eating-place. Don't say anything to put him off. It costs the earth."

After lunch Prue and Linda lay down most obediently in separate rooms. Seth and Georgina departed for the gardening. The peace of an old garden lay about them, ancient apple and pear trees were showing tight buds, a wattle that Georgina called mimosa, was a splash of gold against dark pines, daisies sprinkled the turf under them, rocks

cropped out of the ground at the back which sloped up a rise. "Those rocks are all tilted downward," said Georgina, "in a sort of pattern and I like the way you've trained creepers over them to hang down. Rosemary, which I love, ivy, and what looks like a sort of campanula because I can see blue flowers emerging. Who landscaped those rocks? What a job!"

Seth, tipping out clippings under a tree, shook his head. "No, they've been here from the very time the Ice Age began to thaw. They'd been borne down from the mountains and planed all the same way by the glaciers and left when the rivers of ice retreated. Gosh, I'm proud of myself. Must've retained more from the classroom than I'd thought . . . and you're looking starry-eyed over it. Is that going into the records too?"

"Of course. It's the essence of history. Don't you see, Seth? The pioneer accounts are so new, so young in civilisation as we know it. It needs a background, a build-up so that all who read can feel the timelessness behind it. You know I read up the Maori history

of this area to provide some of this? Well, tangible proof is provided here of unspoiled remnants of pre-historic ages still part of our present life." She hesitated, said, "I mean *your* life, of course."

His grin had been replaced by a look of concentration. Then he said with a drawl, "Could be the first pronoun was more apt . . . *our*."

She turned away, said quickly, "I've got to get that written down," and ran into the house.

* * *

The promise of dinner out had relaxed Linda and Prue more than the long rest. They began to talk about what to wear and to her surprise, Georgina found they both kept changes at the cottage. Linda said, "It'll have to be long skirts and floral tops, Prue, to hide these huge swathes of elastic bandaging."

Georgina looked down, said, "And I've been gardening in what I've got on though perhaps it's just as well I didn't come across in slacks. Would you

be able to lend me a top? I'm going to be Cinderella."

"You'll do very well," said Seth, "Redheads don't need glamorous clothes to enhance their looks. They do the enhancing themselves."

Prue said in genuine astonishment, "I've never heard you turn such a neat compliment, my son."

He wasn't a bit abashed, said, "It's due to Georgina. Every time she rushes off to copy down the words of wisdom that fall from my lips, my ego gets a great boost."

Georgina said darkly, "I'd never have guessed at our first meeting that you had anything but an already over-inflated ego."

"No, I bet you didn't, nor I that you'd ever be anything but shrewish. No, my dear Mama, you can stop raising your eyebrows, we are not going to tell you anything about it except that we clashed sixty seconds after I stepped out of the taxi in Cowes and across her anything-but-hospitable threshold. Linda, you're looking far too interested also. But you aren't going to have that curiosity satisfied."

Linda pulled a face at him. "I shan't even try. Eleanor and Sarah were there. I'll get it out of them tomorrow."

"You won't. By the time *they* got into the hall Georgina had routed me, foot, horse and artillery. It was due to my beautiful forgiving nature that the aunts never suspected."

Linda and Prue looked frustrated, then Linda turned to Georgina, "I've got a perfectly lovely frock I can lend you. Black, which is ravishing on redheads."

"But don't you want to wear it yourself?"

"I can't at present. It has see-through sleeves and though they've taken the stitches out of my arms, the scars still show. I'd look as if I'd been beaten up." The two girls went off.

Georgina fell for the frock immediately, a heavy matt silk with yoke and sleeves of filmy georgette and the neckline under the yoke a deep V. It fitted perfectly, except, as Georgina said, looking in the mirror, "I think more of me shows than would on you."

Linda chuckled. "Yes, but despite what Seth said about you not needing

enhancing, that little extra revealed is decidedly intriguing. That'll show him. I expect a wolf-whistle from him." Her eyes gleamed with mischief. "I'm enjoying this."

Georgina held up a finger. "Now watch it. I don't like that calculating look. It's absurd. Poor Seth."

"Poor Seth nothing. Don't spoil my fun."

"Linda, if you go on like this I won't wear it."

Linda's look was shrewd, "Could you bear not to?"

Georgina said reluctantly, "No." Linda surprised her by hugging her. "It's all right, I won't embarrass you. That's always unbearable. Just be your nice unaffected self. Teasing is over, get your make-up on." They moved into the sitting-room.

Seth gave an involuntary wolf-whistle. Both girls burst out laughing. Seth said, "I've a strong impression that laughter is at me. I'm outnumbered. Come on, the three of you."

The new restaurant had been constructed with architectural inspiration and

restraint so that the natural setting had remained much as it had been. It was a point where nuggets of an incredible size had been washed out and a new gold-rush started. The stony banks and the rushing stream falling down shallow gradients had been left in its original state and above, on the other side, rose dark, forbidding cliffs, visible in the floodlighting that rayed across. A magic place.

Inside was glamour and dimmer lights, and an excellent cuisine with local trout and the land-locked salmon from the lake, venison served in every possible way, plus every other culinary art suited to world palates. There was a sprinkling of locals, one or two of whom nodded, a large party of Japanese, and the murmur of other languages. One man crossed to them when they were well into their third course. He was introduced as Jake Christie, manager of one of the launch companies. "Glad to see you, Seth. I rang Horizon today and was going to call at the *Forty-niner* tomorrow morning. I'm hoping to arrange a tour but Robert doubted you could put on the hospitality

under the present circumstances. So I scouted round and one of the catering firms here is willing to make up some picnic hampers if you feel you're able to put on a few of the usual farming displays. But if it's too much — ?"

"Not sure." Seth turned to Georgina, "Would you be willing to pitch in? I don't dare risk these two being on their feet too much too soon, without the plaster." He turned back to Jake, "Miss Innes is here from the Isle of Wight, to write up our family history, but she's already had to be a jack-of-all-trades . . . or do I mean jill? . . . due to these two here up to mad pranks. She's a good sport, got right into the schoolroom, but I don't know if I have the nerve to ask her for more."

Georgina said, "Of course I'll help. What does it involve? If the food's provided it'll be only making tea and coffee, setting out china and serving, won't it?"

"You're on," said Jake. "The last tour group was very disappointed to be told it was in doubt. Some are Kiwis, bringing overseas friends and had primed their

guests for a day at South Horizon. Addie Barrington sometimes acts as courier, and offered to come and cope, said she knew the ropes, but I said I'd have to ask you first. I'd an idea you and she were hardly — "

"You're dead right," interrupted Seth. "Addie's out. We'll do better without her and in our own way. Usual time? How many? And the date?" Georgina supposed Addie was some bossy female of the type all districts suffered from and that Eleanor and Sarah liked to run things to suit themselves. Jake departed, desserts arrived.

The two convalescents retired meekly to bed, well aware they'd had concessions made them. Georgina tried to follow suit but Seth said, "Don't turn in yet, Georgina, there are photos over here I want you to see. Grist to the history mill." He put a hand under her elbow, moved her to the couch, brought a standard lamp near and turned off the other lights. She said, "Wouldn't it be better with those on?"

He sat down beside her. "Oh, we watch power here. Supply can be dicey." Her

glance was suspicious. "I'd never have dreamed it with all those lights outside at the Point." Her eyes held a glint of mischief to warn him she'd seen through that. He should have looked abashed but didn't. His grin was audacious. "You've got a habit of bowling a guy out. You ought to watch it. It's not endearing."

"I'm not trying to be endearing, Seth." The creases at the corners of his mouth deepened. "No need to try. You are endearing. Very."

She couldn't hold that look. She wanted to match it with warmth. She mustn't. She looked down, touched the box of photos, "We settled down to look at these."

"So we did. Then let's look at them."

Gradually she became absorbed. He did too, she knew. No strong silent hero, this. Well, not silent anyway. Who wanted a reserved man? This one had a gift of words, a love of the storied past that matched her own, something she'd hoped to find in Ward, knowing his business life was concerned with this in part. But it hadn't been there. Apart from a passing physical attraction, there

had been no exchanges of thought like this, no kinship, no oneness.

Seth took the photo she'd been gazing at blankly, said, "You've gone into a trance. Some chaps would resent that when he was in full flow and rather fancying himself as a raconteur, but I'm beginning to understand what makes you tick. Something about this has caught your fancy, hasn't it? And you're letting it gel into an incident for the book, or a comment. Want your notebook? Am I right?" He looked closer into her face. "You're blushing! What ever for?"

She hesitated, then achieved a laugh. "Thanks for giving me an excuse. The blush is for embarrassment. I'm going to confess I did go into a trance but not for lack of interest. Simply that — simply that — "

He said swiftly, "That you're tired and I'm keeping you up. I'm overdoing it, prosing on."

She caught his hand, "No, you mustn't think that because, oh, Seth, you know how it is sometimes. What's being said, even when it's vital for the work you're engaged on, can send your mind off

on a tangent. That's what happened to me then. I suddenly felt what a really stimulating talker you are for anyone in my line, even inspiring and — and — I thought how rare that is. You're a godsend to an author. Oh dear, I'm beginning to think of myself as an author now. How presumptuous."

"What sort of a tangent? What did it set you thinking?"

She knew her cheeks were hot again. "Oh, don't ask me that. I'd love to reply that it was some gem of an idea for the history. It wasn't anything so lofty. In fact it was rather mean. Yes, that's the word. I meanly compared your conversational fluency with someone not so gifted. Comparisons can be odious. Unfair."

He stayed silent, obviously thinking. Why she suddenly realized her hand was still on his. She hastily removed it. To her surprise he caught it back. "Leave it there. I liked it."

She didn't look up. He said coolly and deliberately, "This comparison. Was it with Ward Selham?"

The hand on his jumped. She caught

in her breath. He laughed. "I think I've scored a bullseye. Was I right? I'm pretty sure I was. Georgina, you've been so honest, you admitted you'd lost attention. Didn't cover up. Be just as honest now."

"Yes, it was Ward Selham. But how could you guess that? You only met him when you called at the office to find out where your aunts were."

He looked away for a swift moment. "Well I — " She frowned. This man was rarely evasive or embarrassed. So why now? Then her brow cleared. "Oh, I get it . . . the aunts must've told you. He was the one who said he knew the very person on the Isle of Wight to take on the research they wanted. When they arrived back from Europe and I consented to come down here, they said they felt Ward couldn't be expected to approve of me being away for some time, so I put their minds at rest by telling them it was all off in any case. It was just an infatuation that didn't last. That I was as free as air. I must confess the chance of getting away influenced me. Ward had been offered the top position

in the Southampton office. I thought I was best out of it."

She looked up into his face. It seemed very intent, that look.

She said, "Can you understand my feelings?"

He said slowly, "I suppose I do." He hesitated. "Was that your only reason?"

Georgina knew an instant of alarm. It was too soon to reveal her true reason, to cloud this atmosphere she was working in. She mustn't hesitate. "Perhaps to a woman it was sufficient reason. The whole office knew Ward had been dating me. I leapt at this, knowing that the magnificent bonus from Marius's family meant I could pay my own way and not be under an obligation to anyone."

He nodded, as if understanding, "And you wouldn't let yourself be put off, either . . . by my reaction when I arrived!"

"I should say not, though it threw me when I realized their nephew was the owner, not their husbands."

Suddenly he seemed himself again, and grinned. "And now that self-same antagonistic nephew has had to admit he had to look upon you as a stroke of

luck, in taking over the schoolroom. And we couldn't have found anyone better fitted to take on the task of the family history."

"Well, that's my line and a fascinating story it is. Prue and Linda will be fully mobile soon and I'll get on to it and depart."

There was quite a silence. Neither seemed able to bridge the gap. Then Seth laughed, why she couldn't imagine. He sprang up, said, "What a waste of a night like this to stay inside mulling over these old photos and dwelling on the past. The present matters too. Why not a dander in the moonlight? You've not had a break since coming here. It's surprisingly balmy for early Spring but you'll need that old cloak from the back door."

He saw her lips part over the slightly crooked teeth and one dimple flash out. "What an unexpected man you are, Seth Oliphant — and what a time of night to suggest a stroll!"

"Rubbish! Mother and Linda needed to retire early. Be your age, Georgina. I'm sure you'd fancy that rather than going off to bed."

In a dream she followed him, watched him shrug himself into a sheepskin-lined jacket, let him swirl the plaid cloak about her, clip it under her chin. Words could spoil a mood. Could this really be the man who had almost stopped her coming to this enchanted part of the world?

The prunus blossom was a white blur against its dark branches in the light of a three-quarter moon that had just freed itself from a bar of cloud. Further away the hills reared solidly over a river they couldn't see, but could hear as a gentle murmur in keeping with this dreamy night, with this intangible something that had so suddenly grown between them.

Seth guided her down the rough path to where a tiny stream cut across the corner of the garden from under the next-door fence. A home-made rustic bridge crossed it. He stopped her on it, turned her to him, slipped his hands under the flowing-out cloak, brought her close against him.

In the moonlight she could even see the laughter-creases at the corners of his eyes deepen as he said whimsically, "Talk about history repeating itself . . . another

girl from the Isle of Wight here at the Lake of the Kingfisher. Oh, I do hope George and his Ellen had moments like this away from Hannah."

Hannah! A pity, had he but known it, to bring that name into this hour. Hannah, Georgina's ancestress. The hated one. She shivered involuntarily. Seth brought her even closer. "Don't tell me you're cold. Nothing must spoil this first time of togetherness. Though of course that makes it imperative I do something about it. Like this . . ." he drew her closer still, a warm embrace, comforting.

Then he felt her withdraw a little. She must, he didn't know there were things she must confess, that she *had* had an ulterior motive in coming here, but she knew, intuitively, this wasn't the time to tell. She said, "Let's keep it at that, Seth. A *first* time. Don't let's rush things, take our fences too quickly."

An eyebrow shot up. "What have fences to do with us now? I thought we'd demolished them. Oh, I get it. I'm on my own territory. Everything you've known and loved is thirteen thousand

miles away and I wouldn't blame you if you couldn't forget this was both alien and hostile to that other girl from the Isle of Wight. But it would never be that to you. My mother isn't a Hannah, you know. And what's thirteen thousand miles these days? The Antipodes are no longer the ends of the earth. The world has shrunk, in time. Your people think nothing of hopping on a plane for remote places. I wonder how soon they'd be free to come."

Georgina's heart was thudding against her side. That could be apparent to Seth in this physical closeness. He was going too fast.

He laughed. "All right. I won't take those imaginary fences too soon. I hadn't meant to anyway. I'm even surprised at myself. Perhaps it's your fault, telling me I was fluent. I must give you time. You've seen this idyllic spot only in the deceptive mildness of a false Spring. Only fair to you to see it as you probably will very soon, in the storms that always beset us at lambing-time. Not long now. You'll also experience Christmas in heat and holiday atmosphere and that could make

you nostalgic too, for Christmas in a Dickens setting. But I'm brash enough to predict you'd find great compensations. I'll bide my time, girl, but that isn't to say we can't enjoy the here-and-now."

His grip tightened, he bent his head, brought his mouth down on hers, seeking and finding response. It was a moment that revealed to her how right she had been, even before she had eavesdropped, to have decided not to marry Ward. Oh yes, there had been a few almost-enchanting moments but never one like this. She had had no idea that a kiss could be such a total commitment. All those things written in novels were, after all, true. As if time indeed, seemed to stand still. A kiss that held warmth, tenderness, passion and promise of other more intimate hours to come.

At last Seth had to come up for air. He laughed and there was a hint of exultancy in the sound, "It would've been a pity to have missed that, *tonight* Georgina Innes, wouldn't it?"

Her voice had a shake in it. "I — I suppose so."

"You don't suppose anything of the

sort. What a tame word! You know damned well it would've been a pity. What a night . . . no interruptions, not even my mama around, but sleeping comfortably and plasterless in her chaste bed. Linda too, I hope. Do you know where this path over the bridge leads to?"

"Of course not. I've not had time to explore. But — "

"But me no buts. It leads to a rather ramshackle summer-house, like a chalet, that Dad and I constructed for Mother. It's got a very primitive sort of seat for two, but it's quite a romantic place. We'll still be able to see the moon out of the window. In summer it has rambler roses all over it. Don't doubt my motives in bringing you here so late. I'm not taking those fences too fast. But we can be blessedly alone there and talk of shoes and ships and sealing-wax and cabbages and kings; get to know each other in less populated surroundings than over at South Horizon."

She laughed, completely relaxed. "You are so mad! A place with not even a road."

He said, quite seriously, "But we all live

so closely. It's a tightly-knit community, five families, several houses, the single men and their quarters. I mean even in a city a couple can go off for an evening on their own. Find a world of two. Let's make the most of this."

Bemused, she let him lead her to the rough-barked *manuka* log-hut, sit her down. It was surprisingly comfortable, with his arm between her and the saplings that made the seat, and it had a sloping back. The little stream tinkled musically on its way, a sleepy bird twittered and fell silent again, the moon shone in.

Seth's knee was warm against hers, his shoulder behind her shoulder. They didn't talk all the time, but most of it. He asked her many questions, about life of the Isle, the countries and projects she and Humphrey had been privileged to see on their holidays and since; the loneliness of some of those areas. "So you aren't afraid of solitudes?" he asked with meaning.

"I like contact with other people, love hearing the stories of their lives, but I can't stand having folk round me all the time. It's given me an understanding of

other races, cultures, a knowledge that basically people everywhere have some point of kindredness. There was so much philosophy in many, despite some having so pitifully little. Yet they enriched our lives."

"That's a nice thought. Just as you are enriching ours, as we live life, here on the lake. To think that if I could have, I'd have blocked you coming here."

She put a hand up to his lips. "That's a taboo subject from now on. You thought your aunts had got carried away. And that it was going to be a costly whim for the estate."

"Thank you, Georgina. It's in the past and doesn't matter. I've just thought of something. How fitting that someone from the Isle of Wight, who actually bears the feminine version of George's name, should be writing the history of the sheep-station he loved so well. What a coincidence, a pleasant one. What a night this has been. All plain sailing from now on."

Georgina wasn't sure of that. There was still her lineage to be revealed. He kissed her once more and they went in.

7

SOUTH HORIZON had never looked fairer to Georgina than when *The Cluny* nosed into its bay. Every window seemed to sparkle a welcome and a sense of timelessness cast an aura of happiness about her as if Ellen and George knew and were glad she was here. At that moment she felt all her fears were groundless and she must no longer harbour them. She was needed here to write up the story of this property and by now she was, she was sure, firmly entrenched in the affections of all, loved for herself alone. It could have been so different had she revealed it from the start.

These dear people would not now credit her with suspect motives, would realize that at first she felt she must walk warily. They would think that though Georgina had taken to Sarah and Eleanor, and might have hoped they'd be delighted to know George

had a descendant, she could have had fears that their husbands, whom she'd supposed to be the owners of South Horizon, might be far from pleased at the news. Seth, of course, would understand that his subsequent hostility had put paid to any early confidences.

Meanwhile, here was the task to her right hand. Get on with it, Georgina. She'd told Seth not to rush his fences. *She* mustn't either. It was unthinkable to disturb this atmosphere by unburdening herself, especially when they were on the brink of the most demanding season of the farm calendar.

During the next few days she thought she might be reading her own delight into the moods of the others. Was she being fanciful when she thought they were all elated?

Apparently not. Robert said to her one day, "Perhaps it's the effect being out of plaster has had on Prue and Linda, but it seems to me everyone is being high-spirited. What puzzles me is that Eleanor and Sarah seem the same, and usually at this time, knowing weeks of really hard work lie ahead, they get a

bit het-up. This tourist launch call is a nuisance but they don't seem to care. Well, their trip overseas must've been beneficial. Maybe there's some magic about the Isle of Wight. They've talked more about that than anywhere. Thought they'd have dwelt more on seeing where their forebears came from in Scotland. Anyway, they deserved that time away and they're sure having a dream-come-true, with this history being written at last, and expertly at that. It's all due to you, dear girl."

This praise was sweet. It soothed some of the tremors she still felt from time to time, especially when mail days came. When it was all in one bag it wasn't particularly private. She was always afraid Cluny might forget and put too many details on her sender's address. She had no worries about her parents. Nothing there to give her away. Project mail was always dicey and infrequent anyway. She said now, "Robert, I think it's just being pleased to be home and now Prue and Linda are mobile again, relieved to find things easier."

"I hope you're right. They seem so

pleased about something. Almost smug. They're usually like this when they're hatching out some diabolical plot, then they spring it on us. They've had this air ever since you came back from Ludwigtown."

Georgina felt something strike her amidships. Prue and Linda must've known she and Seth had wandered out into the moonlit garden. Wouldn't have taken much doing; it needed only one of them to have come out for a drink of water or a book, found them gone, perhaps opened the back door and heard the murmur of voices coming from the summerhouse and drawn their own conclusions. She hoped none would embarrass her or Seth. What was between them was as yet too unsubstantial to be taken for granted. What a blessing this tourist party was coming, keeping busy was the thing.

Seth said appreciatively that night. "Just as well you were here, Georgina, or my daft mama and equally daft Linda might have been stupid enough to still attempt the traditional catering. I overheard them suggesting to you they

could still do it with your help. You came down hard and fast on them. She was right, Mother, any overuse of those limbs and you could find yourself back in hospital and plaster. Now, don't say look who's talking, it's because I was so crazy years ago, I know what can happen. We need Linda in the schoolroom, Georgina needs to get on with the book, and — "

Prudence cut in. "What's the hurry about that . . . now?"

He glared her down. "I don't know what you mean. No, don't bother to tell me. I strongly suspect you're putting your oar in, and you could rock this particular boat. In any case, with you not lending a hand with the lambing this year, poor Georgina may be torn away from the history. She'll think we just live on emergencies and interruptions. What did you say, Mother?"

Prue said airily, "I just said: 'Pooh!' Seth, she'll love it like she loves everything else. You're a real backwoodsman, Seth, a horny-handed son of the soil who'd make anyone imagine you'd never heard of equality of the sexes. Women can turn

their hands to anything these days, if they're allowed. Where are you going?"

"Anywhere away from an argument like this. Georgina fixed you. It was all arranged at Ludwigtown that hampers are provided."

His mother looked unrepentant. "That's what you think. She only squashed us helping, Linda and me. She has let them know we're still able to supply the scones and pikelets if they bring the sandwiches and savouries. Eleanor and Sarah are in on it too."

For a moment Seth looked thunderous, then he flung up his hands and departed, laughing.

* * *

It meant an early start the morning of the launch trip but Henry and Robert erected the trestle-tables, put out the utility china from the shearing-shed cupboards, and prepared for the hot and cold drinks. True to Seth's prediction, a few lambs were born early, but with the mild weather still persisting, no trouble.

Georgina found it exhilarating. What

a happy crowd. There were even three people from Southampton, astounded to be introduced to a girl from the Isle of Wight. Sarah and Eleanor were in their element, and the children enjoyed the visit to the schoolroom, then they were let off lessons for the day.

After lunch the conducted tour part was over, the exhibitions of the various station work over and little groups wandered at will among the cluster of outbuildings, hay barns, the woolshed, the garden, the streams. Georgina took bottles of soft drink down to the fridge in the woolshed they'd used for lunch and found one girl had latched on to her. Decidedly attractive, with a swinging pageboy bob of dark shining hair and almond-shaped brown eyes. But not a tourist because she said, "I did want to make myself known to you. Seth was too busy to introduce us. I'm from Queenstown, Addie Barrington. I used to be over here a lot at one time. I know all the ropes so offered my services to the launch company when I knew about the accidents. But they said they had it in hand."

Addie! The one the tour director

thought Seth wasn't likely to want helping with the catering. Certainly not the type Georgina had visualized, the middle-aged bossy type. She was very lovely. Why hadn't Seth wanted her? Not that it mattered. Georgina said, handing her one of the bags she was carrying, "Help me to stow these away, will you, to cool them down in case they want drinks before leaving."

The girl hesitated, then, "I was interested when I heard you were here to write up the station history. I thought at one time I might've been roped in to do that. In the early days our family and the Macpherson family were closely entwined. I'd have loved to do it. In fact, at one time it was thought I'd have been the ideal person for it. But as things fell out it wasn't to be. But I did want to say to you that if it so happened you needed confirmation on those earlier times, I'd be only too happy to help. Sometimes it takes someone one step removed from relationships to see things with an unbiased eye. It can give a better perspective."

Georgina felt a frisson of withdrawal

come over her. How inexplicable, because it was quite nicely said. She didn't give any hint of this away, said, "Yes, that can be true. Sometimes you need the whole picture. At least if you're doing it for an official history, but this is largely for family records and personal pleasure. I delved into the Ludwig Library when we were over there, and among the authentic histories of gold-rush and pioneer times, there were quite a few family booklets, some extremely well-written, that portrayed excellent examples of pioneer courage. What sterling women there were, natural perhaps in a country that led the world in the matter of female suffrage. Isn't it wonderful to think it was granted a hundred years ago when I suppose New Zealand was still part of the British Empire. You get the feel of those earlier years from those accounts. I've found some references to those events in the diaries here."

Addie said, "You certainly do need to get the feel, don't you? Need it more intimately than just recording the history of a place so far removed from your own life. Don't think I'm decrying

your ability, but it's not the same as having someone whose own roots are here, is it?"

Georgina wanted to cry out: "But my roots are here. George Macpherson's blood runs in my veins." Instead she said lightly, "Well, lots of ghost writers take on recording the lives of famous people and do it very well. I think I'll be able to do it justice. I can understand, of course, you'd like to have done it, coming from the same area and perhaps knowing, from stories handed down, all the legends."

"Oh, it was much more than that. If things hadn't taken an unfortunate turn and mischief made, my own great-grandmother might have been an early bride here,"

Georgina conquered that early withdrawal. This could be grist to her mill. "Sounds intriguing, tell me." She thought the girl looked wistful. She must be more charitable, not resent this.

Addie opened the fridge, put the bottles in. No-one was near. "My great-grandmother loved George Macpherson, and he her. Things were going well till

he was asked to accompany old Margot Macqueen to visit her birthplace. Fanny never doubted that he'd come back to marry her. Imagine how she felt when he came back with a bride, someone quite unsuitable. Just a case of infatuation, resulting in unhappiness all round.

"The whole history of South Horizon could have been so different. Hannah, George's mother was very fond of my forebear, recognized her as just the one for George, the one to carry on the family name. Hannah was a wonderful manager. They had to be in those days. My great-grandmother was born and bred here, knew how to make things pay, to last. Ellen even worked on George's feelings till he told poor Fanny to keep away. So a friendship between two families was destroyed. Had she been the wife here that tragedy would never have happened. Ellen was always on at George to widen the mule-track so they could get out by gig and horse. But some huge rocks stood in the way. That was how George was killed. To gratify an unreasonable demand. Fanny would have been content with the whale-boat trips when they took

the wool-bales out and brought back the provisions. Then, after the fatality while Hannah was paying a visit to my family, trying to cope with her grief, Ellen ran away, leaving Hannah to cope alone, against great odds. No wonder she died of a broken heart a year later, and a cousin of the family inherited and the pioneer branch died out."

Georgina was amazed at the feelings that flooded over her. She longed most of all, to refute the fact that it was because of Ellen, George had met his death. That Hannah had wanted an access road into one of the more fertile valleys put through beyond the obstacle of those great rocks. And had tried, quite without success, to blame Ellen, unknowing that George had told his wife his mother had proposed the removal. That was what had sent Ellen from South Horizon; she could not live with such malice.

Georgina swallowed down the hot words that wanted to rise to her tongue, rearranged the bottle to give herself time, managed, "And did Fanny's family, and this cousin's family become friends again?"

"Not then. The dust had to settle. But Seth and I went to Queenstown High School together after his mother married Stephen Macpherson. Oh, I was just a junior, he was a senior but in studying pioneer history we — well, we found a common interest."

Georgina's voice was puzzled. "Would a junior and a senior study together?"

"Oh, Central Otago is a great place for re-enactments. Like the Arrowtown play they still put on from time to time. *All Roads Lead to Arrow*. I took the part of a young daughter of a landowner and Seth was a warden of the gold-fields. It was a note of romance they introduced. It drew us together. Lasted quite a while but finally history repeated itself, Seth went off to Britain. But perhaps you've not got as far as Ellen in your history. As I say, I could really help you with that."

Georgina said in a controlled voice, "I have got as far and, oddly enough, despite what you have just said, this present generation has nothing but admiration for Ellen. She's by way of being a legend."

Addie's voice sounded sad. "I know.

And because of that, they carried on a lasting grudge against Fanny's family, my family, and . . . parted me and Seth."

Georgina said crisply, "Well, I can hardly put that into a family history, can I? It really hasn't anything to do with me. I don't believe in family feuds carrying on. It smacks of Montague and Capulet. The origins of this are back in Edwardian times and ought to be forgotten. They can hardly affect this generation."

The eyes that turned to her were shining with unshed tears. "That's just the trouble. They have been allowed to matter. This isn't just history to me. It overlapped into my life. And again history repeated itself. Prudence was just as prejudiced against me as Hannah was against Ellen."

"Really? But surely she wouldn't let something from nearly a century ago, colour her attitude to someone her son fancied?"

Addie said forlornly, "Human behaviour doesn't change much. Nor do motives and self-interest. Prudence Macpherson is just as possessive about her son as ever poor old Hannah was reckoned to

be. But not just about her son. This is Prudence's home. It wasn't so much that she didn't like me as that she doesn't want Seth to marry anyone. She'll never give up the reins here. Oh, I don't know why I'm telling you all this?" (Georgina could have made a good guess as to that). "I don't know why I felt I must, except that as this family record might develop into more than a booklet I felt it would be a pity if it was too biased in one direction."

Georgina swung round, "I think I hear voices, people coming. Not to worry, Addie. I think you imagine that the story of Ellen and George occupies a greater part of the annals than it does. Fanny doesn't come into it so can't be maligned. I'm writing the records of the whole family. Seth — "

Addie cut in quickly, "You won't tell Seth, will you? I wouldn't like him to think I'd been gossiping to you, because it could put paid to there ever being a reconciliation."

Georgina said, managing a laugh to minimize her feelings, "Can't imagine it cropping up, Addie. A lot of what I'm

writing is of local conditions, markets and prices and transport in its most primitive form, farmers struggling against natural disasters, fatal snowstorms, scab in sheep, and footrot, and keeping supplies from running out. What on earth's that noise?"

She rushed across to a huge bench under which were piles of empty wool-bales and cartons. "Not rats, I hope, attracted by the food here at lunchtime."

She yanked at them, and stooped. Then burst out laughing. "Come on out, young Guy. I can see what you've got. You must've heard Seth saying he was putting a box of Mars Bars into that fridge in case there were any kids on the launch. I ought to scold you but I daresay you thought seeing there weren't, they wouldn't be getting handed out."

He came out, bits of fleece clinging to his jersey, mouth smeared with chocolate, relieved at her tone. He crammed the last bit into his mouth. She crossed to the fridge, took out a bottle, unscrewed the cap. "You'll be thirsty after that," pouring it into a beaker. "You don't deserve it but I'll let you off. But understand this: I'll be giving the other farm kids one each

when they come down, but you've had yours."

Guy gulped the drink down, said thanks and started making for the door, not sure if his luck might hold.

Addie said, "He ought to have had a clipped ear, not lemonade."

Georgina chose to be flippant, "Well, perhaps a slap on the bottom. Ears should never be assaulted. They're too precious."

It had given her great satisfaction to metaphorically clip Addie's ears. The bunch of tourists reached the shed, partook of the cold drinks, Addie being so sweet to them, tipping ice in, offering biscuits, and, as Georgina noted, casting glances in Seth's direction. Over everyone's heads he smiled at Georgina. One of those endearing smiles without rhyme or reason. Georgina wasn't going to let anything Addie said, matter.

* * *

Three days later they were not only into the thick of the lambing but also the weather Seth had feared. Georgina could

scarcely believe such a change. It blew up during the night and by dawn the men were out on the hillsides, fortified by hasty breakfasts and well-clad for it. The lake wasn't kingfisher-blue now, it was gunmetal grey, tossed into huge waves that tore savagely at the shore and fountained into spiralling foam against the solid contours of the Echoing Cliff. What had been a sheet of sparkling colours was now a gale-swept and shelterless expanse menacing and pitiless.

Trees bent before the screaming force of the wind, wreaking havoc among the daffodils and early blossom and the rain had the feel of ice in it. Already two or three lambs were in boxes of hay on the verandah with heat-lamps above them, and Prudence, happy to be reasonably mobile again, had a long bench ready with patent food, bottles, and the marvellous Lamb Reviver, ready for use on lambs too weak to suck. The same was being done at the other houses and before long Seth was in with a trailer full of bleating lambs, and some ominously quiet. When some had been restored, Georgina, fascinated, lending a

hand, Seth said, springing on the four-wheeler farm bike with its trailer again, "I'm off to give Robert and Henry a hand at the mothering-pens, have some coffee ready when I get back, would you, Georgina?"

On his return he gulped some down, filled a flask for the men, said, "Like to come down? I see you're into old gear. Were you hoping to be asked?"

She nodded, "If a novice won't get in the way," but she was already reaching for a hooded weatherproof coat with a warm lining and tying the cords under her chin.

"It'll be filthy" he warned her, "and you won't come back smelling of roses but you may as well get used to it."

She wouldn't meet his eyes. She pulled on gumboots, said sturdily, "It's not the season for roses. Lead on, Macduff."

She flung a leg over the pillion and they were off. To her great relief Robert and Henry didn't make her feel a new chum, "Good job she's a long-legged lass," said Henry as she made no work of getting into the pens. She was amazed at the differing temperaments of the ewes,

instructed in massaging swollen udders to make them yield the life-saving fluid, holding lambs between her knees, trying to stroke milk into their mouths. Robert looked sideways at her and said, grinning, "He's throwing you in at the deep end, isn't he? Good thing too. If you can take this, you can take what it needs." There was an acceptance here.

She said lightly, "Perhaps he thinks I'll get the right atmosphere into the writing-up if I experience it at first hand."

Again the grin. "Aye, that'll be it. What else?"

Seth caught the words, said, "I'm quite capable of sorting out my own motives, Robert." His gaze flickered to Georgina's as he lifted a lamb in beside a distressed ewe. She said hurriedly, "Of course. It's all hands on deck in a storm. Oh, how marvellous, this one's got the right idea."

He chuckled, "Right, when it's got a good start, you can come out on the next round with me." He burst out laughing, "What a girl you are. You've gone all starry-eyed. It's no picnic and that rain's turning to sleet."

"No matter. I'm actually going to see lambs being born. It's like being on a TV series, one of the veterinary ones."

He pulled a face. "A lot of that's under cover. Not here. But come on, if you're still rapt at the end of an hour we'll give you a medal."

Henry grunted. "Make no rash promises. We haven't any medals about. You needn't worry. That lass has got red hair. She's a well-plucked one. They're all the same. After all I married one and I've never seen her daunted yet. You'd be better to promise a bonus."

True, Sarah did have red hair. Georgina said, "Yes, it's the exact colour of George's beard."

Seth put a hand under her elbow as she climbed out of the pen, "Of course. That's where she gets it from. After all Sarah's forebears were George's forebears. It runs in the family. They ought to have called *her* Georgina. Pity they didn't think of it. Would have been nice to have had one in the family. Which side of your family did you get yours from? Mother or father?"

"From my mother's mother. *Her* father

had the same." She wondered what his reaction would be if she said, "His name was George Macpherson." Seth said, "You'll have to hang on to me really tightly this time, it's a rough paddock." Georgina didn't mind how tightly she clung.

There was some shelter with clumps of trees, huge Australian gums that in shedding their bark made a dry floor under them inches deep. The other men were busy in the next great paddock. She had to bite her lip at times, distressed at a couple of fatalities, gladdened by other quite strong lambs, up on their feet and soon responding to mother-care, exasperated at the odd ewe who wanted to trot off, uncaring.

They returned with only one exhausted ewe in the trailer and several lambs for the boxes, most of these ones of twins whose mothers, as yet, might not have enough sustenance for them. Prudence had hot soup ready and sausages and bacon in rich beef gravy. Georgina had never been more hungry in her life. One corner of the long verandah was glassed-in and held besides hooks for

their streaming coats, two big steel tubs for scrubbing-up in, and dry towels.

Prue said, "Now, Georgina, you must have a good rest this afternoon. I'm quite capable of feeding those bleating horrors out there."

"She can rest tonight," said Seth callously, rising. "She's not too bad as a land-girl. Come on, Freckle-face. Never noticed those freckles before."

"Of course you haven't. My make-up's all washed off, you idiot."

He grinned. "Other things got washed off too. Like your veneer of manners. Idiot indeed. Right, off we go."

Looking back Georgina surprised a look of approval on Prue's face. Yes, a matchmaking look. How then did that tie in with Addie's assessment of her as a possessive mother? It didn't. Georgina wasn't going to worry about that, or about anything else. Working side by side with the man you loved in conditions like this, revealed what calibre of people mother and son were. In two days the streaming hillsides lay under cloudless skies. Lambs were born in ideal conditions, there were fewer occupants of

the verandah boxes, though still a few replaced the ones who were now reunited with their mothers or teamed up with ewes who had lost their own lambs. The lake returned to normal levels, almost, and the muddy waters discoloured by the drainage from the gullies, took on a blue-green tinge again.

The feeding of the lambs was a heavy routine and the men were constantly out, assisting with the births, but suddenly Georgina found herself back most of the time on the history. She felt re-vitalized. She was sure now that these folk would understand why she had kept Ellen's secret, till she could come to South Horizon and sum up their possible reaction. Perhaps they would like and respect her enough . . . oh, not *they*. Perhaps *Seth* would. He might see her as worthy of George, inheriting his colouring, and not look for any traces of Hannah in her makeup. She pushed it into the back of her consciousness and made sure she never got trapped into bringing Cluny into the conversation. They often asked, in kindly fashion, about her parents, her brother, and were keenly

interested in her letters from Venezuela. Carefully censoring them at first reading, she read out to them any bits they might find interesting. Nothing from Cluny's, and that good sport had remembered not to put her address on the back of the envelopes as care of Guillaume Molyneux.

There was one moment when she was almost caught off-guard. She had read an extract out about the bridge-building. Seth said, "Thank you for sharing that, my dear Cassandra."

She and Prue gazed at him, mystified. Then Georgina said, "Why Cassandra? Wasn't that the one who was always croaking and foretelling doom? When have I ever done that?"

He chuckled. "Just wanted your reaction." He turned to his mother, said, "She wouldn't tell me her second name. It begins with C. So I thought it must be an old-fashioned one, or a silly one, like Cleopatra. Then tonight I got my eye on that envelope with Miss G. C. Innes on it and thought I might jerk it out of her. Especially if I said Cassandra. Though that's quite

nice shortened to Cassie. Rather sweet. The first girl I ever fell in love with was Cassie. She was seven and had big blue eyes."

"And was she Cassandra?"

"No. She was Catherine but her brother couldn't pronounce his tee-itches so called her that. What is the C. for, Georgina? Cressida? Clorinda? Clementine?"

Georgina's one dimple showed. "I just don't believe in satisfying idle curiosity."

He shrugged. "I can only imagine you got teased about it at school and let it stay a sore point. You oughtn't to. I told you I was called Elephant because I was Oliphant."

Prudence said quite sharply: "You had the chance of changing it, Seth, but wouldn't take it."

He nodded and suddenly his face looked all planes and angles. He changed from his bantering note. "No, and you know why, Mother."

Prue looked down quickly and said, "Of course. Sorry, son," and added very meekly, "And you were right."

Georgina sensed a hurt. For both.

She said quickly, "Anyway, Seth, you were way off-beam. Second names aren't always Christian names. They can be family surnames handed down, often cumbersome."

Seth nodded and left it alone. "I say, your people think nothing of hopping on planes and taking off for the far corners of the earth. How about them coming here? Say for Christmas. Humphrey too. Be a novelty for them to have Christmas in mid-summer. How about it, Mother?"

Prue's voice was warm. What ever had disturbed her a moment ago had gone. "It would be lovely. Oh, Georgina, do write and ask them. I could put a note in to impress on them how much we'd like that."

Georgina felt dismayed. The fewer here who knew of the early link, the better. She wanted to tell them in her own time and that wasn't now. Before she could reply the phone rang. Seth answered. He sounded surprised, turned, said: "It's an overseas person-to-person call for you, Georgina. From Mr Marius Salvatore. From Italy."

He noticed Georgina had stars in her

eyes again. She flew across. "Georgina Innes speaking." Seth didn't ask her if she wanted to take it in private. Prue did. Georgina shook her head. "Marius, oh, how wonderful, darling. Didn't expect to hear your voice down here at the bottom of the world. It's late Spring, Marius, and an incredibly beautiful one. Lambs on sunshiny pastures, and mimosa out on the hillsides, though they call it wattle here. It's nearly over. You can't imagine how colourful this lake is. And kingfishers nest in the clay banks and match the lake. You'd love that. Are you still birdwatching? Good. Mount Serenity still has snow on it and it's reflected in the water, a perfect cone shape. And ranges of mountains behind it, from what's almost the tailend of the Southern Alps. Have you ever thought of coming to New Zealand? You'd love it? *What?* you are coming? Oh, that's all it needed. You to see it too. When? Next month? Why that's nearly here. And you'll be at Queenstown? That's just a few miles from Ludwigtown. I know these dear people here so well now, I'm sure I can ask you to spend

a day here . . . I see — you'll do the North Island first and will ring on your way round the South. Hang on . . . "

Seth said quickly, "If he's not tied to a tour he'd be welcome to stay here for as long as he liked." She took her hand from over the mouthpiece, listened, said, "Oh, good. You could leave the tour at Mount Cook, fly here, then rejoin it at Queenstown. Fabulous!"

When she had hung up she said, "Well, we'll have Marius first and consider having my folk later."

Prue said, "Anyway, make the suggestion to your folk that sometime we'd love to have them here."

Georgina said lightly, "I'll do that but not yet. Mother was going to visit my grandmother in the States and I think the relations there are planning to show her around and also to have a grand reunion."

In spite of Seth's offer of hospitality to Marius she thought he was very quiet the rest of the evening. Almost as if he were disturbed. Not at ease. Prudence went off to bed.

Suddenly Georgina thought she knew

the reason. "Seth, I'm sorry that bit of banter came up about my name. When your mother said you'd had the chance to change your name and hadn't taken it, did it touch on a nerve? I mean was it an old bone of contention? Had she wanted you to take your stepfather's name because of the estate? If so I'm sorry I was responsible for it cropping up. No doubt it was offered to you for the kindest reasons but your name is your own."

His face cleared. "Oh, mother hadn't wanted it for anything to do with the estate. No talk of my inheriting it then. It was when she first married again. She loved Stephen so dearly and he had no children of his own by his first marriage. There was another reason, though I'd rather not tell you of that yet."

She drew away a little. "Oh, sorry, Seth. I accused you of idle curiosity earlier. I sound inquisitive. That's worse. Think no more of it." He recognised her sincerity, caught her hand, held it as if seeking comfort. "I'd like to tell you what it was, Georgina, but not yet as I said. It's not the moment. Won't be

tempted to ask Mother, will you? I'm sure you wouldn't, so don't feel hurt I should ask that. But if she ever brings it up, don't head her off, just take it as a confidence as if I'd not enlarged upon it to you. Will you do that for me?"

She nodded, then brought his hand up against her cheek in a fleeting caress. "Families all have their vulnerable spots, Seth, and we have ours. Not in recent years, but long ago. So I do understand. I was only concerned because for a moment Prue looked so sad . . . "

He said: "I think stricken might be the word you were fumbling for. She did. I hadn't realised that at times it still hurts. Thanks for being so understanding, Georgina. Now, how about something to take our minds off such things?"

She half-turned, "Coffee?"

He pulled her back to him. "No, not coffee . . . this," and he bent his head. Surprised and bemused, she turned her head into the comfort of his shoulder. His finger tilted her chin. He kissed her cheekbone, let his lips travel upwards to her temple, dropped a kiss on each eyelid as she closed her eyes, said, "You

have such beautiful eyelids," then his lips found hers. Presently he said whimsically, "Well, that's calculated to make me sleep well."

She looked a little mischievous, perhaps to hide how stirred she was, said, "Then I'm well rewarded. I don't believe in lying awake mulling over things that happened long, long ago."

He smiled. "Perhaps we all sleep better, knowing you are sleeping under our roof, Georgina C. Innes."

If only it had been left there. He seemed to loth to end the evening, said, "We missed the earlier news." He switched the late news on. The radio voice filled the room. They were on to the second item. "One of the largest farm properties in the North Island has had a shake-up in ownership. Bought about fifty years ago by an Englishman, apparently a bachelor, who then married, It passed in time to his two sons. Recently a claimant has appeared from England, a son by a previous marriage. No hint of bigamy, the first wife had died before the second marriage, and he had been reared by an aunt and had believed his father too was

dead. On the aunt's death, information had come to light. This could seriously affect the continuance of the ownership of the estate in New Zealand, with this older claimant turning up." Other items of news followed, none of which registered with Georgina.

Seth switched off. "What a ghastly thing to happen to that family. Oh, this one will have a rightful claim of course, but it could ruin the others. At the best they'll have to raise a huge mortgage to buy this one out. None of it their fault, of course. But just imagine all the years of hard slog that had been put in there. If it is already owned by two brothers, they may have sons of their own they hoped might carry on in due time. A secret like that could be devastating when revealed. The whole estate could be carved up. Almost impossible for there not to be deep resentment on both sides. And the only ones to benefit could be the legal wallahs."

Something in Georgina froze. Seth's recipe for sleep had been ruined by that one item on the news. She evaded his goodnight kiss.

GEORGINA was now possessed of the feeling she was writing against time. Stupid when they'd said take all the time she needed; that they appreciated what Seth called her extra-mural duties, and when they'd made that surprising offer to invite her family for Christmas it underlined the fact there was no need for haste. Yet now she had this urgency to complete it up to the present day, in case, just in case, they found out and doubts set in. The claimant case in the North Island still occupied a lot of radio time, and Georgina was thankful that the isolation of Horizon meant no TV. Seth's comments on it as time after time it came on, were driving her to distraction.

The urgency she knew was because she passionately longed to do at least this much for her family, for George and Ellen, in recording the history, so that even if she was caught out she had

still served them. She knew perfectly well Seth was discovering within himself a tendresse for her but it was so frail a thing as yet, something as flimsy as gossamer, born of the beauty of this lake, the mountains, the clear, untainted air, the magic of a roadless kingdom, and the irresistible moon in the Ludwig garden. It was so hard to remember the grim hostile meeting at the threshold of her English home. She must remember, nevertheless, that he was capable of lashing out if he was doubtful of motives. Those doubts had been justified!

Stop it, Georgina. Back to the typing. There's no tension here at present, except in your own conscience. She loved the teasing camaraderie that existed between mother and son. Oh, if only Hannah had been like this. If little Cluny could have grown up here, a child of mountain and lake. She came to herself with a jerk. Idiot! In that case she, Georgina Innes, wouldn't have borne her own surname. Imagine never having known her father. At the thought of that big, bluff fair man of the great open spaces of the world, Georgina's own world steadied.

Looking back trying to change time and hemisphere was an unprofitable exercise. She slid a virgin page into the typewriter and consulted her rough notes. The anodyne of work . . . nothing like it. She became lost in a world before even George was born back in the grim yet colourful gold-lust years.

Prue, scarcely a limp remaining, brought in the three o'clock afternoon tea, fresh pikelets that Georgina called drop-scones, spread with raspberry jam and cream. Prue looked with awe at the pile of typescript. "It's really taking shape, isn't it? I'm lost in wonder, love and praise to think that when you've got that done, you'll go through it with a fine-tooth comb condensing it. Then start in on Seth's computer. To me it's fascinating how you can give a picture of life as it was lived here then, yet include an accurate record of prices and markets and even politics. I used to gaze at those old account books and diaries and clippings and feel if we attempted anything ourselves, it would just be boring, but you're weaving a most readable story. I can picture the unvaried diet of meals at

first, the inevitable mutton, the sacks of oatmeal, the wheat that had to be ground into flour, the cases of golden syrup as a jam substitute till their fruit bushes yielded. The fact their sugar always ran out first.

"Then you've got me agonising about illness striking and no help near; Isabella's home-style remedies, surprisingly effective in some cases, tragically inadequate in others. We take anti-biotics so much for granted now. They were all of three-quarters of a century away then. Imagine, Isabella nursed Ewen for six weeks with pneumonia till the crisis was reached and past. And his complete panic when she had Thomas before the midwife arrived over, and he discovered there was another to come! Little Ella; but both survived and so, to his surprise, did Ewen. He reckoned he only coped because his gentle Isabella stormed at him saying surely a high-country shepherd knew what to do and said for him to imagine he was delivering twin lambs. Sheer drama, yet you're getting in historical data too. What are you looking all wide-eyed about, dear girl?"

Georgina said, "Don't say anything else . . . I just want to get that down. I wish I'd had the tape recorder switched on. That's life as it was lived here in a nutshell. Not all of that is in the diaries but it's come down to you by word of mouth. It's just what I need at this very moment."

A voice sounded from the doorway, "And what this high-country shepherd needs is a large mug of tea and some of those pikelets. But don't worry, I'll get them myself."

"You sure will. Don't disturb my train of thought, or your mother's fine flow. Prudence, you're a gift to a chronicler, Oh, I get so traumatic thinking there must be so many incidents like these unrecorded, so much many of you here know, but haven't told. Things you might never think to tell me."

Scribbling apparently done, Seth dared to move to the table, seize the teapot. "I'd have thought by now you'd have enough for three volumes, the way Sarah and Eleanor keep rushing over here every time they think of something their mother told them. Though what amazes me is that

Robert and Henry have been bitten by the same bug. By now you'd almost think it was their idea. Their repetition nearly drives me mad but you take it and look for more. Then when I've come back to find them gone, you've got the tape recorder on listening all over again."

"Oh, there's always something fresh. They give these annals a different slant because they were workers on the estate, not actually running it. It's all grist to my mill. I admit, Seth, I find it hard to condense but I'm used to it, and at least this is all in my own language. In Naples I had to remember my words were going to be translated into Italian."

She was sure he scowled. "Oh, yes, this Marius. How tough was it?"

"Pretty tough, but what saved me was that Marius worked with me all the time. His family spared him from the business. But I found it difficult to sort out fact from embroidery. They couldn't help exaggerating. But here what I find fascinating is that though I have the same tale told over and over by different people, yet the variations are very slight. Makes me think of the early

clan histories in Scotland where tales were handed round as they gathered by the hearthsides in the long winter evenings. Almost always the same listeners, so they didn't dare embroider."

Prue beamed. "I like that comment. Though what I've enjoyed most about this whole project is that as the stories are told to Georgina I feel as if Stephen was here in the very room. Because they are so much as he told them to me when I was teaching the farmhands' children when I first came. How wonderful that I answered that advert. I so nearly didn't."

"Why not? Too remote?"

"Yes. I was afraid it could affect Seth's future High School education. But when Murdoch Gunn — who's still the Rector — got that hostel built, organising it so most pupils could go home for the weekends, it solved that. I didn't accept the job till I knew it was in the offing."

Seth said, "And it gave me, eventually, the best of both worlds. Stephen sent me off, later, to Lincoln Agricultural College near Christchurch, to rub the corners off me. But for that my life could've been so different. Odd what slants life takes."

"Indeed it is," said Georgina.

Prudence said, "Oh, by the way, Seth, that part where Linda's plaster had rubbed, still looks a little angry, so I've decided Ken must take her across to have it looked at. How about if we make it tomorrow and give Beth and Doug a day off too, with the older children? We could look after Guy, and Sarah and Eleanor said they'd love to have the toddlers to themselves. I sounded them out and when Guy heard they'd spend the day shopping he said he didn't want to go. The other two need shoes. What think you?"

He grinned. "I can imagine your reaction if I vetoed it, my dear mama." He turned to Georgina, "My mother is the perfect example of the iron hand in the velvet glove, you may have noticed."

Georgina found herself saying quite hotly, "She is not! You are so lucky, Seth Oliphant. Her consideration for the married couples is what keeps your employees here long-term. It could be very different. I've noticed now she's mobile again, how often she takes the children off their hands. It's the sweetest

thing the way she has the youngsters over to the evening meal by themselves in turn. All children like to be invited out by themselves. Makes them feel persons in their own right."

Seth's voice was mock-mournful. "And here was I thinking that my conditions here, and the bonus system, were what kept them happy, but if you're going to apply psychology to the community here, what about me? You could set up an inferiority complex in my mind. Make a worm out of me."

Georgina snorted. "What? You? Worms aren't arrogant males!"

He considered that, "No, you're right there. Aren't worms asexual? Or do I mean hermaphrodite? Not male or female. And anyway, when was I ever arrogant?"

Her eyes gleamed. She couldn't resist it. "I'll tell you . . . when you announced you were staying the night in my parents' house and when I queried that, you said that seeing it looked as if the aunts had let you in for giving me the hospitality of yours, you didn't think it would be too much to expect me to offer you the

hospitality of mine!"

Prue gasped. "Seth: You didn't? How could you, to a girl like Georgina? A gem of a girl."

He chuckled most unrepentantly. "Well, you see, Mother, I didn't know she was a gem then. More like a thorn in my side. I thought the aunts had gone dotty. And if you're going to say it's a wonder she didn't slap my face, you're dead right. All I could think of was that Eleanor and Sarah had landed me with the cost of a return by air to New Zealand and would be on my payroll, to say nothing of her keep. I was sure we could get someone locally to write it up. Now . . . keep cool, Mother, I know now no-one could do it as well as Georgina is doing it — and it hasn't cost us a penny — but anyway, she was so winded at knowing I was the owner of South Horizon, and not the aunts and uncles, she just dropped on to a convenient chair and Eleanor and Sarah arrived out and embraced this wild Colonial boy from Down Under and we both — Georgina and me — recovered our poise enough to be civil to each other over an excellent fishpie and pavlova."

Prue said, "I still think you were lucky she didn't turn it down flat when you reacted like that to the aunts' idea."

There was a faintly derisive note in Seth's voice, Georgina thought. "Oh, she had her own reasons for not doing that. She told me later that afternoon that she had personal reasons for wanting to be away from Britain then. She must have had, if she was willing to spend all that on the trip, and in the face of my disapproval. Now, don't fly at me, Georgina. I accepted that those personal reasons weren't my business and came to realize that a much-travelled family like yours thought nothing of distant projects. And you had this bonus from the Salvatore family." Then he had the effrontery to add: "At the time, I admit, I just hoped she didn't think we were likely to follow suit. Now, Mother, don't eat me. You are about to say I ought to have known immediately she wasn't that sort at all. Men don't have this intuition you are always bragging about."

Prue's eyes, so like her son's, lit up with laughter. "I wasn't going to say anything of the sort. I thought it extremely odd

myself and just hoped that this girl Sarah and Eleanor had fallen for wasn't running away from a husband or a relationship that had gone sour. But she came, took on the schoolroom duties without protest, and I was conquered. Recognized her for a kindred spirit. Pour me another cup of tea, son, and I'm sure Georgina needs another."

Georgina did want another and as she sipped it she was wishing passionately she was as motiveless as Prudence believed. They had come too close to the bone for comfort.

* * *

The couples and the older children departed in a holiday mood, Sarah and Eleanor took the toddlers to the play-park behind the houses, Robert, Henry and Seth took off for distant paddocks in the Land Rover, and Prudence and Georgina with some enthusiastic help from Guy, fed the diminishing quota of lambs in the carport and even moved electric fences for the rotating of grazing areas that was so successful a part of modern farming.

It was after the evening meal that Guy, looking up from Legobuilding on the floor said suddenly, "Why didn't you like Addie, Georgina?" All three adults gazed at him uncomprehendingly.

Georgina said cagily, "I don't know what you mean, Guy? What made you think that, for goodness sake?"

Pity she'd put it that way. Children were so direct and Guy in particular was never evasive. Asked a question, he answered it.

"You sounded that way, that day."

"Well, I didn't like her saying you should get a clip round the ears for pinching the Mars bar and hiding with it."

Guy looked scornful. "I didn't mean that. I mean when I was hiding. Before you dragged me out. You were too polite."

"Too polite? Why shouldn't I have been polite? She was just offering to help me with the history and — and — well, she was explaining a few things. I think you got your wires crossed. And what about putting the Lego away now? We said you could stay on a little while

after the others got back. It's time you went home."

"Sure is," said Seth firmly, to Georgina's relief. "Look, I'll help you pick these up. But you can leave your model on the windowseat and finish it after school tomorrow. How's that?"

Georgina was glad to see them making for the door, but as they went through it, Guy turned, said stubbornly, "But why didn't you like her, Georgina?" Seth pulled him through, closed the door.

Prudence lay back in her chair and laughed. "The tenacity of a bulldog has nothing on young Guy! Reminds me of my own son at that age." She looked at Georgina who wasn't laughing. "Don't be embarrassed, dear girl. But let me tell you one thing, if that girl hinted that Seth was ever in love with her, forget it. He wasn't. She tried to make the running. She hadn't a hope. That family's never been popular with us."

Colour, whether of relief or what, Prudence couldn't tell, flooded back into Georgina's face. Had she wondered if Seth had loved Addie? Better not probe. What lay between Georgina and Seth

mustn't have the bloom rubbed off by other people. Just as well she didn't put her thoughts into words. Georgina would never tell Addie had accused Prudence of being a possessive mother. She simply didn't believe it.

Seth came back, "I can only hope that what they brought Guy back from Ludwigtown takes his mind off that particular track. Not to worry, Georgina, no-one would blame you for having an aversion there. That girl's pure poison."

Georgina wanted him off the subject too. "Oh, it's no use paying too much attention to what kids get into their heads. In the main I enjoy what tangents they strike off on. The irrelevancies. Like the other day when Linda and I took them up the creek after school to build a dam and have a little picnic. After it we lay on the grass making daisy-chains when Andrea said, 'What's Heaven really like, Mum?' Linda said: 'Well, at this moment much like here, sun on my back, birds singing and none of you quarrelling.' Andrea said scornfully, 'I was serious.' Carl was serious too, he turned over on his back, looking up at

the sky, and said, 'I know what it'll be like. It'll be being able to look down through the stars instead of up.' That gave me a moment of magic. I feel that child's destined to be an astronomer. I suppose we all have our own ideas of heaven. I read a poem once in a magazine depicting a gipsy's idea of it. Campfires and an open road."

Prue's voice had a note of longing in it. "I know my heaven. Just to see Stephen again."

Georgina was aware that something flashed into Seth's eyes for a moment. He turned his head away then back, said, "Georgina, What's yours?"

Her answer was so prompt they both stared. "To be able to stroke a tiger." Then she said defensively, "Why not? It's Biblical."

Seth succumbed. "Biblical? I can't remember anything about stroking tigers in the Scriptures." He went on chuckling.

She gave him a withering look. "It says the lion will lie down with the lamb. So there! I'm not so keen on lions. Those shaggy manes make them look top-heavy and untidy. I suppose their wives look

better groomed. But a tiger is so sleek, so handsome, and that lovely bit between the eyes. I'd love to stroke it."

Prudence was laughing too. "I'm glad you told us. It's such a revelation. But I'm glad there's no zoo around. You might be tempted."

Seth stretched himself. "Well, after a day with the indefatigable Guy you need some peace and quiet, Georgina. Come on out and see Carl's stars. We don't watch them often enough. Goodnight, Mother."

They walked down through Ellen's garden where the daffodils had given place to spicy stocks and cinnamon pinks, heralds of summer to come, through a track in the shrubbery and gained the terrace above the sleeping lake.

Georgina said, "You were a bit abrupt, weren't you, Seth, leaving Prue like that? Especially after what she'd just said. Her idea of heaven."

He slipped an arm about her shoulders, turning her to him so he could look down into her face. The moonlight wasn't strong but the stars blazed down in a silver radiancy. "Oh, Georgina, I wanted

to leave her in that mood, thinking of Stephen."

Georgina bit her lip. "Sorry. I — I had an idea you — "

He looked searchingly. "Come on. What idea did you have?"

"Don't be mad with me. Because it would be only natural if you had, for a moment, felt that way. I — I mean you could so easily have resented her saying it about Stephen, not your father."

Looking up she saw as once before, his face was all planes and angles. So strange in someone so square-jawed. "I didn't expect her to feel that way about my own father." He hesitated. "They weren't happy, Georgina. Oh, perhaps they were for the first little while. I'm eternally grateful to my stepfather for making my gallant mother so happy for as long as she had him."

"I'm sorry they weren't happy. But don't let's go over old unhappy far-off things, as Wordsworth puts it, Seth. Not tonight. I think it's lovely that you don't mind your mother loving your stepfather more. I hope it didn't spoil your own memories of your father, though."

His mouth was wry. "I haven't any memories of him. Just a vague presence, that's all. I was only two when he — " he came to a stop.

"You mean you were only two when he died. Or do you mean they parted then? Oh, I do wish I'd not blundered into this."

"It's all right, Georgina. He didn't die till I was eight. But they were — in a way — parted. You haven't blundered, Georgina, but I'd rather not tell you yet. But I will tell you. I must. Meanwhile, girl, didn't I bring you out to contemplate the stars?"

She looked up. He laughed, and kissed her. All the magic of vast solitudes were about them. The lake waters moved softly against the shore, the lights in the other Horizon houses winked out one by one. The world was theirs alone. He said, looking up again, "I like young Carl's idea of looking down through them instead of up. People gone before us looking down and smiling. My father among them. Do you feel like that too?"

She said softly, "Yes, I'd like to think my great-grandmama who died before I

was three was doing just that. What a thought."

He continued, "And I'd like to think Ellen was."

Georgina had to resist the impulse to cry out, "That's who I mean." Seth added, "Ellen and her George . . . don't you realize they must often have dandered along this shore, watched these self-same stars. Wonder if they had a favourite. I have. Ever since I came here as a boy. That very bright one over the Echoing Cliff."

"Oh, I like that. I'm sure they must've, it stands out from all the others. Wish I knew more about the stars. I must read them up. Do you know what you just said sounds like something Shakespeare once wrote. Oh, what was it? . . . *That I should love one bright particular star.* It could have been something Helena said in *Alls well that ends well*. Seth, don't you love it, when your thoughts match up with one of the immortals? It happens every now and then. You read a line in a poem and say to yourself, amazed, 'Why that's what I've always thought.'

Seth said, "Let's make up our minds

that George and Ellen loved that one best of all too."

He walked her to a low headland that looked towards the Echoing Cliff. They stood, a faint breeze fanning their temples now, looked back and saw because of the rise in the ground, a light that marked the Twin Hills homestead. She said dreamily, "It was wonderful meeting the Campions the day they spent here. I loved Geoffrey Campion for the stock he came from. To think he was a descendant of the couple who befriended Ellen in her hour of need when Hannah's spite and enmity was just too much to bear."

"Yes, ancestry like that means a lot. Yet so often history proves it doesn't always count, that youngsters with everything against them can rise from their background and put the world in their debt. Leonardo da Vinci for one. And many others."

"Yes, I've often thought that wonderful. Oh, look at Mount Serenity, the glimmer of its snows, as if promising peace."

She saw the side of his mouth quirk up. "I guarantee when you first saw it you thought existence here was going

to be anything but serene. What a first meeting we had! I could've shaken the life out of Sarah and Eleanor. Now I'm vitally interested in the recording of the history of an estate I had no right to inherit."

She took him up on that. "I hope it's not a sore point, Seth. It couldn't have gone to Sarah and Eleanor's children because they were all girls and married men not farmers. But there's a kind of bond recognized as quite close, you know. There's kith as well as kin. That saying means friends as well as relatives. Earlier, I think, kith meant the bond of home-grounds, like in clans, rather obsolete now, so the word has survived more in that other meaning. But one's kith can sometimes be dearer than kin."

He caught her to him. "Oh, you are the nicest little thing! You constantly amaze me with all the things you know. How in the world could you come out pat with that?"

"Because in writing up the Salvatores, although I had this smattering of Italian and it was to be published there and in England, it had to be expressed in both. I

would keep on using English phrases and idioms. That was one. Though working so closely with Marius he saved me from too many traps."

"Well, bully for him! I remember you said the family firm released him for the task. Not like me, I spend my days out on the hills with the sheep."

"That doesn't matter now that Eleanor and Sarah are more free with the lambing nearly through, and they grew up with the history because Laura, their mother, was on the estate and adored Ellen. Did your grandparents, Seth, on your father's side, keep you up with the Oliphant history? Because even if your mother and father drifted apart, you'd a right to know about your paternal descent."

"Yes, Dad's parents did, bless them. They were devoted to my mother. And she to them." She said hastily because she didn't want him to think she was prying about that breach, "I told you once I looked up the Oliphant history. It struck me that the clan motto fitted you so well . . . *Provide for all*. Because you certainly do. I know the others have shares in the estate but your mother

told me you would only accept your inheritance if you were allowed by deed of gift to increase their holdings, Henry's and Robert's as well as their Macpherson wives' portions. Your mother was proud of you doing that, and rightly so."

She sensed he was embarrassed by her praise and changed the subject. "And how absurd you calling me a nice little thing. I'm not in the least little. I'm five-foot-ten. It's only because you're six-foot-two you think that."

His voice deepened. "It isn't, you know. I used the diminutive in the affectionate sense . . . and you know what, Georgina? — I didn't bring you out to talk about history and family mottoes! I can see you're all set to babble on about the Oliphants coming out in the Forty-five. I refuse to talk about my illustrious ancestress Carolina, named in honour of the Bonnie Prince — I had a little pleasant dalliance in mind."

Her laughter had a lilt in it, even as she said mockingly, "Watch it! That smacks of a Charles earlier than the Bonnie Prince, and *that* Charles, the

Merry Monarch, was a man to beware of. It's time we went in."

He caught her to him and it was a few moments before she could say, "Slow the pace, Seth. I've a job to do. I don't want to be distracted." He said, "Why, did Marius distract you too much?"

She was shaken with inward, delicious laughter, said demurely, "At times, yes, when I'd have to tell him I must get on alone." It wouldn't hurt him to think that way.

There were times when Georgina had to be taken across the lake to look up county records, peruse documents. She had to be firm about Seth's persistent offers to take her. She didn't want to be accused of taking him away from his work. Seth was disgruntled, to Prue's amusement. Especially the day he heard her ringing Rosamond MacQueen at Strathdearn, about it. He said, "It's safer for me to take you."

Prue knew full well he wanted Georgina to himself, and went wicked. "How can you say such a thing? Rosamond is as much at home at the wheel as you are. She was the Southampton lass who'd

always messed about with boats. I daresay you did, too, Georgina."

"Yes, to a degree. Enough to regard the sea with respect. But with Dad away so much we didn't have a craft of our own. But I'm told Rosamond knows all the moods of the lake and the mountains."

Seth looked scornful. "So she should. She had to be fished out of the lake once, at Glen Airlie Bay."

Prue snorted. "Seth! What's got into you? Talk about a false statement. She wouldn't let the men fish her out! She got such a shock at seeing Matthieu where he'd no business to be, or where she thought he hadn't, she fell off the jetty. It was Matthieu who had to be fished out when he dived in to the rescue. He had heavy shoes on. When they got him out she further humiliated him by diving in again to get her own sandals. Perfect example of true love not running smoothly."

Georgina sparkled. "Sounds gorgeous. Wish it was in our history. I mean this history. Anyway, Seth, on the way over Rosamond's going to fill me in about old Margot MacQueen getting the

young George to accompany her to the Isle of Wight. Rosamond says Margot suggested it to give George a break from his mother. Rosamond was told these things by Margot's son, old Gaspard, Matthieu's grandfather. It's good to have an entwining of the earlier history of the over-lake families."

"They certainly were entwined," commented Seth, "that was how George met Ellen. You've realized that, I suppose. Ellen's father was a Somers, a cousin of Margot's."

"Yes, of course. It's here in the records." (She had known it long before she'd ever met Seth).

He said now, "You ought to suggest that you could write up their history, to Rosamond. You've no job to go back to."

"It's already being written. Rosamond and Matthieu are doing it. She and I are looking up similar things together this trip. Now, if you don't mind, I'd like to get on."

He grinned. "More ways than one of telling a chap to shut up, aren't there? Right, I'll do a crossword."

* * *

The pile of typescript grew steadily. Just the first copy; the second would be much easier, revised. This night Prudence had been lying back with her feet on the extension of the Lazyboy chair, gazing reflectively into the fire. It seemed as if her first utterance came from those reflections, without any leading in. "Why didn't you like Addie, Georgina? Did she say something to really upset you? Because she's a mischief-maker."

Georgina shrugged, "Oh, she made me flaming mad sticking up for Hannah and condemning Ellen for leaving her. She'd started by saying *her* great-grandmother had been courted by George and expected to wed him till he went off with Margot and got infatuated with Ellen. I couldn't say much back to her about that, because I'd never heard of it but when she said George got killed because Ellen was insisting on the track being improved, then cleared off leaving Hannah to manage the estate and cope with grief, it was all I could do not to tell her that it was Hannah who'd asked George

to blow up those rocks, and that it was Hannah's despicable accusation that Ellen had asked him to do it that sent Ellen back to England. That Hannah had wanted that outcrop of rock out of the hillside to give easier access to the valley. But I held on to my temper though it was hard to clamp down."

They stared at her. Then both spoke at once. Prudence said, "How do you know?" and Seth said, "Where on earth did you find that?" Then as a duet: "We never knew that."

Too late Georgina realized there was no way she could have known it except from her own family. It had been the last straw for Ellen. If Hannah was capable of such lies, she would not risk having their child brought up under her influence. but — she gazed at them dumbly. Oh, how much better to have told them than to be found out like this. What was there she could say?

All unknowing, Seth saved her. "I've got it. No wonder you're looking dumbfounded, Georgina; when you look at this stack of papers! My first thought was no-one but Ellen could've known

that. And we never found any of her diaries — had she overlooked one, and did you find it? Or is it possible she wrote Hannah from over there, telling her she knew? Was there a letter you found?"

Georgina felt frozen. "No, I didn't find a letter. I'm not sure how I knew. I —

A light seemed to break on Seth. "I know what it'll be. You must've got it from the Campions. It was Geoff's ancestor who helped Ellen get away in their boat . . . They're the only ones who could've known. She must have blurted it out. Was that it?"

What a predicament! He'd be bound to ask Geoff. She mustn't involve them. She said feebly but honestly, "I'm sure it wasn't the Campions."

Then, mercifully, Seth said, "Well, what matter where you got it? You'll come across it again. But it's interesting." Then he said in an ordinary tone, "Before we have our last cuppa, I must tell you this. If I set a mousetrap in your room, Georgina, would it startle you if it went off in the middle of the night? This — "

"I should say it would. What on earth — ?"

"I meant to tell you both earlier. You and Mother were out playing ball with the children and I disturbed a mouse in my room, gave chase, and it ran into yours. I'd yanked my shoe off wanting to deal it a death-blow but it got behind your dressing-table and disappeared. I pulled out the bottom drawer and there it was but it got away. Thought I'd set two or three traps."

Prue was most decided, "You'll do nothing of the sort. I'd rather have hordes of mice running over me, than hear a trap."

All of a sudden Georgina, out of sheer relief, wanted to laugh. One moment she thought she was going to be forced into a confession, the next they were talking about mousetraps.

She didn't get into bed right away. As she went to draw the curtains, the sheer beauty of the lake made it seem a crime to do so. Her room faced the same way as George and Ellen's. They must have seen this exact scene many a time, here in this house they had made a refuge from Hannah's bitter tongue. They too would have seen these stars reflected in

the dark waters, the white blur that was the reflection of Mount Serenity. It might even have been on a night such as this that Cluny had been conceived. Magic in the thought.

She sat down on the sheepskin-covered windowseat, rested her arms on the sill, her chin in her hands. Tomorrow night, under these stars she would tell Seth and hope for understanding.

9

ALAS for plans of mice and men . . . the mouse had probably decided this was no place to be and had negotiated the stairs and found a happier life in a grain-shed, and at six Marius rang from Mount Cook to say he'd be with them in two days' time. This then was not the moment to spill the beans, not knowing what the reaction would be, not only Seth's but everyone's. Seth kept chipping in as she talked.

She put the phone down, said, "It wasn't necessary, Seth, to insist I should tell him he'd be welcome to stay here as long as he likes. I couldn't argue with you with him on the line, but a topnotch tour like that will be putting everything on in the way of local sightseeing and we can't expect him to give up those. I could have stayed a couple of nights in Queenstown to see him."

He grinned unrepentantly, "No fear. I'd rather have you here, both of you.

Mother, stop glaring, and Georgina, what are you looking so mischievous for? It's not the sort of look I expect from you. After all, if he prefers the conducted tours he's only got to say so. This may not be as well-known as Skipper's Canyon or Glenorchy but it's no less beautiful."

Georgina just laughed and went running upstairs. She'd made up her mind to search every inch of her wardrobe and drawers in case that mouse had established a family in luxury quarters.

The dressing-table had come out with the first Macphersons, so no wonder the mouse had been able to scale up the back and get into the drawer, the wood had shrunk. Good thing it had scampered away when Seth had yanked it out or he'd have been tossing her undies all over the place, but they were still undisturbed in their neat lacy piles. She shook them all out. Heavens, good thing again, if Seth had, he'd have uncovered the heirloom hanky sachet. The colours were so striking he'd have been bound to have recognized it. She ran her fingers over it, lovingly.

Some patches were as Seth had

surmised, scraps from Ellen's wedding-dress material. Others recalled Cluny recounting to a rapt Georgina, what Ellen had told her. "The red ones with the satin spots were from the frock she wore when she first met George at Margot MacQueen's old home, the Somers home. The dovegrey was what her mother wore, the blue from her bridesmaids' frocks, the green taffeta belonged to one of the evening gowns she wore on board ship, and the lavender and pink too. And the lining of the sachet, Georgina, was made from the remnants of her calico wedding-night nightie!" Cluny's eyes had gleamed with mock horror. "They frilled this embroidery around the wrist-length sleeves and high collar. It was tucked and frilled where ever tucks and frills could go, but it was saved from primness with little sprays of forget-me-nots and roses worked on the bodice."

Georgina hadn't used it as a hanky sachet, too afraid the delicate silks couldn't stand it. She'd brought it for sheer sentiment's sake. Well, no trace of mousie here.

* * *

Marius came in on one of the smaller planes to save going to Queenstown. As the passengers streamed towards the terminal, Seth said, scanning them, "Oh, dear, Georgina, I think he's missed it. There's nobody young coming off."

At that moment Georgina flew across and was clasped to the chest of a tall, white-haired man, with almost black eyes and was being kissed most enthusiastically on both cheeks. Seth swung round on his mother, who appeared convulsed, "Mother! You knew. Knew he was in the sere and yellow. And, dammit, you knew what I thought."

She tried to pull herself together. "Of course we knew. We had a good laugh over it. That's why I came. I didn't need to. I wanted to see your face. The coast's clear, dear boy, go to it! I mustn't let Marius see me laughing."

Marius, all unsuspecting, reached them, his arm affectionately through Georgina's. Her eyes were brimming greenly as they met Seth's. Marius was tired of being with the same folk all the time and had

arranged to catch up with them at Lake Te Anau. "Not that we plan to walk the Milford Track, even if it is reputed to be the most beautiful walk in the world. We're all a bit past that. But these days, it seems, we can be taken up in a launch to Glade House, do a few miles in what they say is the most enchanting part and return to our luxury hotel at night. This gives me the privilege of being longer with our dear girl, to whom our family owes so much."

"Marius!" protested Georgina, "you aren't to talk in that strain."

"But I will. I must. You even put your life at risk . . . "

"No, that's exaggeration. I forbid it. Besides that bonus you gave me enabled me to come here, a place that, back in Edwardian days, had a link with the Isle of Wight. We'll tell you all about it tonight."

Prue called Marius's attention to something and under cover of that Seth said to Georgina, "I've other plans for tonight, wench. I could slit your throat. Mother's too. You with all your darlings and cooings. Even back in

Cowes you said he was the bright star in your firmament."

"Well, he *is* a darling and hearing his voice that first night after your shattering approach to me was balm to my soul."

"That's enough. That subject is taboo. Don't you dare tell Marius. Let him think all has been light and sunshine. He's charming, sure, but how am I to know that his hot Italian temper wouldn't rise if he suspected I was so hostile to your coming? I myself will do my best to make him think I too thought you a gift from heaven, just as you were to the Salvatore family."

"You'll overdo, Seth, don't." She turned back, "We've got our own boat at the water's edge. I can't wait to get you to South Horizon. It's sheer beauty."

Marius's indrawn breath and resultant sigh on beholding Horizon Bay was tribute enough, but he was an articulate man and his very slight accent only enhanced what he said. "So remote, such loveliness unspoiled, untainted. It's like a kingdom all its own. And to think those roads leading back into those mountains and valleys are all yours." He waved an

expressive hand. "And to think none of this has ever been touched by war." Then he said swiftly, "Forgive me. I sound envious. How can I? I do not forget that there must be homes here, around this lake, which must mourn husbands, brothers, sons, fighting a war not theirs on our hills. Already, in Auckland, I have met some who did return, my own age, not unmarked by that conflict. Two I knew in my own military days."

Seth was noticeably moved. "Thank you, Marius. In all our little towns there are memorials of both wars bearing the names of our pioneer and later families. And there are some in Ludwigtown who came back, and later took their wives to see the Italy they had learned to love."

Marius, later, at the dinner Sarah and Eleanor put on in their quarters, when the same subject was touched upon said, "And oddly enough, it was an English girl who was the instrument by which some of our family treasures were returned to us. It was due first to warfare, then to — what was that phrase I liked, that you once used, *cara mia?* I know,

due to the chicanery of some of my own countrymen."

Georgina said swiftly, "Every country has its criminals, Marius. Every family has its black sheep. It's a fact of life. To be accepted."

Perhaps it was because she was on a high tonight, making her responsive to atmosphere, that she sensed some shadow crossed Seth's face, though he said comfortingly to Marius, "Of course. The contrasts, the blacks and the whites, that most people have to acknowledge and live with. Not to brood upon."

Georgina saw Prue wiping the stem of her wine-glass. She must have spilt a little. Seth continued, "One thing Georgina tells me, Marius, is that you are a magnificent rider. Care to ride with me while you are here?"

The fine dark eyes lit up. "Si, si. To feel a horse beneath one and to leave the roads to go where one wills, is happiness indeed. In my childhood I was brought up, mainly, on our country estate and my sisters and I were hardly ever out of the saddle." He looked across at Georgina, "Tell me, little one, have

you managed to overcome your fear of horses yet? So strange in someone so daring on the roads of Italy, driving on the opposite side from what she'd been used to, and managing to keep that sense, that perspective right, even when pursued by villains, who were after the papers that gave the clue to our precious lost treasures. No, my dear, I will not stop. I am at last in full flow. It is right that these people here who are as a southern family to you, as I can see, should know you for what you are."

Seth put out a hand to stem the disclaiming words that were obviously springing to Georgina's lips, and kept his hand on hers. "Let's hear Marius out. I knew — or at least wondered — when one day you shivered when you were recalling something that happened in Naples. At least you seemed to be recalling something. Go on, Marius."

"She managed to get access to some documents merely to be able to describe what we had lost. In some way word of this search got back to the illegal . . . or should I say illicit? . . . dealers, of her interest. She got some photo-copying

done and perhaps she had betrayed a little air of excitement that made them realize she had recognized the significance of it. She did feel while it was being done, she was crowded a little by a couple of other customers but put it down to no more than impatience to be attended to. She slung her suitcase into our car and drove off. Before long she suspected she was being followed, thought our house might be robbed if she drove straight there and decided to throw them off the scent.

"It was far from easy but she managed to keep ahead and just when she thought they were going to corner her, she spied a police-station and drove straight into the courtyard. They thought she was turning into a side-street, realized too late, tried to turn and collided with a parked vehicle. The crash brought out the officers, which of course meant — er — routine enquiries; their names and addresses were forced from them and that led back to long-ago associations and the art treasures came back to us. It was splashed — is that the word? — all over the papers both in Naples

and London and even further afield."

Georgina, cheeks hot, said ruefully, "I'll say. My father rang from Canada and ordered me home."

Marius laughed. "But she would not go. She told him she wasn't thinking of making a habit of it, that she had a job to finish and finish it she was going to do. Yet she still fears horses."

Seth said, "She'll conquer her fear of them yet. The youngsters got her on to one of their slowest ponies the other day. She must. I want her to come up the valleys with me soon."

Marius said, twinkling, "I expect she makes work her excuse. A strong sense of duty. We thought that when she finished our history she might have taken a long continental holiday. Long before, we had offered a reward for information leading to the recovery of our family heirlooms, but though she wouldn't accept anything like that sum, she did take what she called a bonus. We urged a trip to Canada to her people, but she had promised to do Fanchon Carteret's biography and postponed a well-deserved holiday. So my sisters and I were so very pleased

when she told us she was spending it on coming here. And I think it is working out very well, is it not?"

There was a chorus of assent. Georgina plunged quickly into less personal subjects, began recounting the first grim days of Ewen and Isabella's incredibly primitive travelling to reach the shores of Moana-Kotare and how even later, when they managed to secure a couple of mules from an estate in the province of Canterbury, the hazards of isolation had been stern.

* * *

With Marius there and the companionship due to a guest, there was no more dallying beneath the stars. All too soon, though, it was time for that last full day when Seth and Georgina would conduct Marius round the beauty spots of Queenstown, Lake Wanaka and Lake Hawea, finishing up with a magnificent dinner at the Skyline Chalet, ascending up the pine-clad heights in the lighted gondola cars strung on cables.

As they said goodbye at the door of Marius's hotel, he whispered to Georgina,

"Don't be afraid to take a chance of happiness here, dear child. Your parents are world travellers. It's a shrinking world in time, if not distance. You would often see them. Somehow you seem to belong here. God bless."

She was glad Seth had drawn away a little, to let these two who had shared so much, have this moment to themselves. Then she was into the car and didn't mind at all that she had to mop away tears in front of Seth. His big calloused hand came to pat her knee. "A grand fellow, Georgina, well worth a tear at parting." She said, "And thank you for being so considerate to let us have that moment alone."

Seth said, with a groan, "Truly noble of me. I don't feel nearly as good about having to pick Nick and Greg up now. I had planned to have you to myself on the launch going back. I have things I must tell you, and the next few days we'll have to make up for these last pleasurable days."

She said crisply, "So must I. It was a wonderful interlude but disrupting. I've managed to get away from our obsession

about Ellen and on to some of the less dramatic but no less praiseworthy exploits of the succeeding years. The nice gentle romance of your mother coming here and Stephen falling in love with her. Would it be all right if I went to Dunedin to see your sisters? I know they are both expecting their first babies but I could stay at an hotel."

He said, rather quickly, "Would you mind postponing that till they arrive up here for Christmas, complete with husbands?"

Georgina said, "I didn't realize they were coming. Seth, knowing that, you still tried to persuade me to invite my parents and brother here for then! I think men have no idea how much preparation women have to make preparing for guests."

"Oh, it doesn't all evolve on Mother, you know. Sarah and Eleanor share it. Their daughters aren't coming this year, they are going to their in-laws. But you vetoed the invitation to your folk so strongly I've had to go along with it. You point-blank even refused to mention it to them. Said you had your reasons

though I can't recall you stating any."

She heaved a huge sigh as they drew up to pick up the men.

"Well, I couldn't butt in on their own plans. They're hoping to spend Christmas with my grandmother and Uncle G — with Granny's brother and sister in Florida. It's not often they are all together. Besides, there are so often delays not anticipated on a project. A longer trip, like to New Zealand takes planning. Now, does that satisfy you? I hate being rushed."

"It looks as if I'll have to be satisfied. Yet, somehow I feel you're being cagey about this. As if it's not your only reason. What an odd girl you are, Georgina, so open most of the time, so reserved at others. Oh, lord, they're out waiting for us." Nick and Greg were full of their own doings, right across the lake, and the hour was so late it was no time for confidences.

* * *

They had to make up for time lost entertaining. Hitch after hitch occurred

with farm timetables. Georgina applied herself steadily to the job in hand and even when Seth was in at night he spent much time in the office. Of course this estate was really run as a company, and that seemed to entail a terrific amount of phone calls. Letters arrived from the twins saying they were coming at New Year instead. Prue didn't seem very disappointed. She even said to Georgina, "I'd rather you saw them later, anyway. I don't want any shadows from the past being cast upon you now. Things could be very different by New Year . . . all bitternesses could be forgotten then."

What could she mean? Georgina crossed to Prue's side, gave her a quick hug, dropped a kiss on the cheek nearest her, said rather unsteadily, "Prue, I'll go along with that. There's danger always in family histories, of revealing things better left unrecorded. Nothing need be told in this, you'd rather be left out. And Prue, you would never show bitterness."

Prudence's voice shook. Her hand came up and patted Georgina's as it rested on her shoulder. "Thank you, Georgina. It means a lot to me to

hear you say that. There was a time, however, when I was very bitter. The fact you don't consider me capable of it is all due to my Stephen. He rooted every little bit of resentment out of my heart. Oh, how I wish he could have known you. He couldn't have helped loving you."

Georgina said, "Don't think of me as a paragon, Prue. I know that because I was able to help out in the emergency when I first came, you think of me as reliable. I'm far from perfect. I've done things I'm not really proud of now. Don't be carried away by Marius making me out a heroine. That was only a spur of the moment thing. You do what you have to do in circumstances like that. There are other things I've not been half so brave about. Shirked. Impulsive and ill-considered."

Prue laughed. "Who hasn't done things like that? Even things that have harmed other people. Even one's own offspring can have suffered. But — well, let's leave that till after Christmas."

"A much better idea!" The comment came from the doorway. Seth. "I aim to tell Georgina myself, at the right time.

She'll have to know, and I believe she'll set your mind at rest, Mother."

Georgina caught the glimmer of unshed tears in Prue's eyes. She said quickly, "Then let's leave it at that. I'm sure you can trust Seth to put things straight. Sometimes we make bogeys out of things that in the end other folk make nothing of. We're all getting too tense. I've been worrying about something too, and Pre-Christmas is no time for hassles. Don't let's mull over any potential problems till we have to. Seth, if you can spare Robert and Henry, each in turn, quite by themselves, for an hour or two, I would like to have them recount some of the epic stories of men who have worked up here in the more robust days. They are part of the South Horizon kingdom too."

* * *

Inwardly, Georgina was aware that if Seth Oliphant had problems that concerned Prue, it would be to do with his father, and it could, somehow, make her own confession more easily understood. As long as he accepted that it was solely

a longing for more knowledge of the stock whence she had sprung that she had come here, and without any thought that she might benefit from it. Or that Cluny might benefit. That no thought of claim, legally or morally, had been behind it. Meanwhile, to work!

There came the day when Georgina felt the first rough draft was far enough advanced for it to be stowed in the fireproof file in the farm office. The end wasn't complete. That would have to wait till Seth told her what he felt he must, and she made her confession. Then Cluny could be included in the history, a happier note in those sad events. Then, and only then might it be possible for her family, her dear family, to visit. Now she could help Prue with all the preparations.

She said one day, "Prue, how ever many are you expecting? You've enough cookies for an army! Oh, something I've been meaning to ask, do you skip the boiled puddings and just have fruit salads, trifles, pavlovas? Because it's so hot."

Prue laughed, "We do provide those

things, but they'd be horrified if we didn't have puddings to set alight and for the children to get their money out of. I've made them. They're in the deep freeze. I did them the day you and Seth saw Marius off. How grateful I am for the freezers. Thank goodness there's enough electricity in the plant for those, even if we have to be careful with other gadgets. We don't worry if the children don't eat much pudding. Anyway, the couples are having dinner in their own homes this year, because their parents are coming. Seth's going across to Ludwigtown early Christmas Eve to get them. On Boxing Day we'll put on a get-together barbecue near the woolshed, and have games and dancing there afterwards. Incidentally, though of late years everyone seems to go for turkeys for Christmas dinner, this year we're reverting to the old-time New Zealand fare, home-grown legs of lamb with new potatoes, fresh green peas, with mint sauce and the rowan jelly I made last autumn. And of course all the other home-grown vegetables. Also, this year in view of the fact that you're recording the history we're going to do Colonial goose.

That's legs of hogget mutton, boned and stuffed. That's what the early settlers did, to remind them of geese at home.

"Everything's organized. The men always do the decorating of the woolshed as soon as the December shearing's out of the way. They ride up Tree-fern Gully and get masses of red rata and mistletoe. It's native mistletoe and it's also red, so take care where you stand. It's just as good for kissing under. Well, now you've taken a break from the recording, you can help me stock up for the shearing gang."

"I'll enjoy that, for a change. I'll start right away. What first? I'll put that last lot of papers back in the old trunk tonight."

Prudence said, "Not till after lunch for the baking. Put them away now, and take a break."

Georgina picked up a huge pile. These hadn't been quite so interesting on the personal side. George's father hadn't been one for diaries except as they affected times of calving, lambing, putting the rams out, getting in supplies. An old receipt fell out. She smoothed it out.

She noticed something she'd not seen before, an amount for a remedy of the time, much used in the treatment of mammatis, and it was marked with a blue-pencil cross. They did a lot of blue-pencilling then. There was a query mark next to the cross. And a scribbled note: "Checked. I wondered why so large an amount but not overcharged. Hannah had ordered it in my absence. Might have known. Due to her concern for the animals. Bless her."

She looked up. Seth was leaning in at the open window to tell her something. He'd just got his first word out when he checked and said, "What are you looking so starry-eyed about now, Redhead?"

She flew across to the low windowsill. "Look, Seth. How truly wonderful. Hannah did have some good qualities after all. She was compassionate towards animals, and despite her cheese-paring ways, didn't mind what was spent on them. Look . . . her Duncan had appreciated it. He even added: 'Bless her.' He needn't have done. It's always the little extras, the unnecessary things, that warm my heart."

Seth's face was close to hers. Those eyebrows almost brushing her cheek. He laughed. "What a girl you are. But I like it. Sad to think that someone with a quality like that could get so warped and possessive, so jealous. I'm glad you feel like that about her, Georgina, perhaps it'll make you understanding of other people's failures too. You'll be looking for redeeming qualities." His fingers gripped her chin, and he kissed her warmly, movingly. They had a moment of looking into each other's eyes in a kind of linking, bonding. Then she said: "Of all the places for kissing!"

He chuckled. "There could be better, I admit. Like inside the room." He pushed the window up further, began to throw a leg over the sill. She gave him a little push. "Don't be absurd. Your mother's ready to set the table. I can hear her pulling out the knife-drawer in the kitchen."

"Spoilsport" he said, and went on his way, laughing.

* * *

It was frantically busy, mustering the sheep for sheering, and in the soaring temperatures preparing the huge meals was exhausting in the extreme, yet somehow it was exhilarating too. Kept Georgina from wondering how this situation would resolve itself. At night she was too tired to stay awake, thinking of it. She felt Seth would wait to tell her what he thought he must till after Christmas, and before the twins and husbands arrived for New Year.

One day, when they'd flopped on the verandah and had long cool drinks, just the womenfolk, Eleanor said, "I sometimes yearn to have Christmas in England. Ours is so much more complicated. A friend said to me on the phone the other day, that though people might shiver in the Northern Hemisphere, at least they could concentrate on Christmas alone, not madly having to pick ripening fruit, and cope with children home for the long holidays. Her raspberries had ripened before the strawberry jam, the blackcurrant and the gooseberry jams were made. Her lawns needed mowing twice a week, all the

breaking-up concerts for schools and church and clubs were coming at once and she was making costumes for some. She was all for Christmas in winter, believe me."

Georgina was surprised to hear herself say: "What heresy: Here all the scents of summer are drifting up to us, roses and mignonette and lavender . . . just look at those sun-drenched paddocks and blue skies . . . and water-skiers in Echo Bay, making foaming wakes behind the boats. All right . . . both worlds have their own loveliness, but right here and now, I wouldn't want to change this." She laughed at their astounded looks. "Oh, last week when we were feeding the shearers with their gargantuan appetites, I didn't feel like this, but now — " She waved an expressive hand at the iridescent waters and added, "And yesterday, I actually saw a kingfisher dive into the creek right where it runs into the lake and it was a perfect match. Besides, if I should long for snow to make it more Christmassy Mount Serenity is still wearing a tiny cone."

She turned to Prudence. "Mind you, I

still think you overdo things. Seeing the twins and their husbands aren't coming till New Year now, I couldn't understand why you practically springcleaned Ellen and George's room and the other spare double and even put the sheets and pillowcases on. We could have done that after Boxing Day."

Eleanor said, "Oh, I can understand it. I get all geared up before Christmas and like to flop after, knowing I'm ready for visitors later. I regard the week before New Year as a holiday. Like going bathing with the children, taking them picnicking up the far gullies. With the Land Rover and the four-wheel-drive truck to ford the streams with it's so much easier than in the old days when we had to ride. Georgina, when you've finished the history, you must have some more lessons. There are still a few places only accessible on horseback."

Georgina laughed. "The way you try to spin my time out, I think you're trying to cast a spell over me."

Eleanor said simply, "Do we need to try?"

Georgina didn't want them to pursue

that idea. She got up, made an excuse, went indoors. They were all matchmaking, even Robert and Henry. But though Prue knew there was something Seth felt he must tell Georgina, and she was sure it concerned his father, they didn't guess she also had something on her conscience. She still had no idea how any of them would take it, both the revelation of the relationship and the fact she'd kept it secret. One consolation she clutched at was that perhaps what Seth had to tell her, might make him more approachable, more understanding. He'd evidently thought it better to leave it till after Christmas. The days were so full now.

At last the big woolshed was cleared, the bales shipped off on the Campions' barge, a hectic day but satisfying.

Then came the day Seth said to her, "Georgina, I want a full day in Ludwington to do some special shopping. I still like everyone to get gifts that are surprises and in a township so small they've only got to see you coming out of a special shop to make inspired guesses. So I've told them I'm off on my own

tomorrow except for you." He grinned. "They very much approve of us having time off together, you know, so it was a piece of cake. It could give us the rare chance of an uninterrupted talk going and coming back."

What an opportunity. Her spirits rose. She would enjoy the festive season so much more with her secret out in the open. That relief lasted just two minutes. Greg and Nick arrived on the verandah. "Boss, Henry said we'd have to clear it with you, but he can spare us for a couple of days this week instead of next. We were going to get the tourist launch to pick us up but we heard Linda saying to Doug you are going tomorrow." Greg stopped dead. "Oh, I can see it doesn't suit you, Seth. Did you have something in mind for us to do?"

Seth wiped the scowl off his face and managed a chuckle. "No, can't think of a thing on the spur of the moment but I wish I could. You deserve your break when you want it, but you guys seem to have never heard that two's company and four's a helluva crowd! It's okay for you two. Your girls are in Queenstown

and presumably you achieve some time alone with them quite often. I warned the family off and now look what Henry's done. Yes, come. I give up."

Nick burst out laughing. "Never mind, you'll have her to yourself on the way home. Pity you haven't got an automatic pilot!"

Georgina disappeared smartly. Seth was certainly making it plain. Happiness was breaking over her. All would be well. They had little contact the rest of the day and he was busy in the farm office in the early evening, then went over to one of the other houses. It was late when he came back and Prue and Georgina were told he still had some cheques to write. They said goodnight.

Prue had just reached the stairway when Seth poked his head out of the door. "Just a moment, Georgina." She came back to him, "Yes, Seth?"

"I know you usually wear slacks or shorts on the launch. Don't tomorrow. Wear that green frock I like so much. You look just like that painting of Ellen in it."

She was so surprised she said, "I'm not

in the least like *Ellen*," and immediately wished she hadn't emphasized the name. By now from so often sneaking up to gaze upon those pictures of her progenitors she knew so well how like she was to George, her namesake. But Seth noticed nothing, said, "Of course not, wrong colouring. I meant the frock is exactly the colour of Ellen's. Anyway, will you wear it?"

"Y-yes." She looked at him a little uncertainly.

He said crisply. "Fine. Just a whim. Goodnight again."

She went slowly upstairs. She thought she was justified in thinking, after that, that this day coming was to be a special one, nicely sandwiched in between the despatch of the woolclip and the festivities of Christmas. So be it. She wouldn't lie awake tonight composing exactly how she would tell him that this family history was her history too. It would all come about very naturally. He knew her now as he hadn't at their first meeting.

Had there ever been a lovelier morning? Dew-fresh, with the promise of heat to come, the lake Ellen had so loved showing opaline glints in its turquoise.

Even the banter of the two farm cadets was enjoyable; they too were part of this scene, part of her future. She was as sure as that and as serene as that classical mountain sloping down to the lake.

Ludwig had a charm all its own, with here and there the chalets of the holiday homes among its pines and with older brown and white timbered houses, with window-boxes of bright geraniums and petunias, so reminiscent of the early Austrian and Swiss goldminers who had settled here to wrest a living from the soil once the precious metal was exhausted. No second crop with gold. They shared comments on these things as they shopped, sometimes separating for the secrecy of certain purchases. What fun. She was looking forward to the return trip. Seth had said briefly, "Coming home we'll find some unfrequented cove on the far side. Having your hands on the wheel cramps your style. Though I've got to do some serious talking first."

Halfway through the afternoon Seth said, "I've one more gift to get. Meet me by *The Cluny* at three-fifteen."

She made it ahead of time, stowed her

parcels aboard, renewed her makeup at the mirror in the cabin, smiling at her own reflection, then came up on to the jetty. She'd wait for him beside that willow overhanging the pavement and the lake. A happy scene, with holidaymakers already thronging the foreshore and a group of children staring down at the shallows watching the teal as they dived down and scuttled underwater foraging, for an incredible time. Their laughter floated up to her, sheer delight in it.

She would see Seth coming towards her presently, with his confident walk, broad-shouldered, tawny hair catching the sunlight . . . Seth, now infinitely dear to her. He did, laden with more than one parcel, after all, said, "I'll get rid of these and come back to help you aboard. (Quite unnecessary but delightful she thought). He leapt aboard, stowed the stuff, sprang back. The jetty was crowded. She looked down at the boat rocking gently at her moorings.

He reached for her hand at the very moment a voice behind Georgina said, in pleasure and anticipation, of the surprise Georgina was going to get, "Georgina

Innes! It *is* you! How extraordinary to find you here at the very moment I was thinking of your grandmother when I spotted this boat called *The Cluny!*"

Every word was dismaying clear. Seth dropped her hand. Georgina swung round, unable for a moment to take in what had happened. As she realized what this meant, she found a mist had obscured her vision in the intensity of her feelings. Then the need for good manners asserted itself and she managed: "Dorothy Charteris! How absolutely amazing to see someone from home. How on earth did you get here?" She achieved a slight laugh, said, "Well, by plane obviously, but to this particular spot?"

Not the happiest choice of questions evidently, because this middle-aged woman's reply was just as clear, just as devastatingly revealing. "Well, that's directly due to your family connections with Moana-Kotare, though I certainly didn't expect to find you here. I didn't even know you were in New Zealand. I'm visiting my cousin in Auckland. She wanted me to be godmother to her first grandchild and I'd intended coming some

day in any case. She booked me in on a South Island tour, and of course they all come to Queenstown, and I thought, seeing it's so near, I'd like to see the original of that painting on Cluny's wall. I always loved it. I've taken a lot of photos to show Cluny when I get back. That's if she's home by then. How long does she intend to stay with Guillaume and Laurette?"

Somehow Georgina managed to respond even if her very lips felt stiff. She was aware of Seth now standing a little back from them, rigid with shock.

She got out: "Cluny's spending Christmas with them. Mum and Dad and Humphrey may make it too. We didn't want Cluny to go back home when I wasn't there. At nearly eighty it's not good for all of us to be out of the country at once." Her voice trailed off. She'd caught sight of Addie Barrington standing behind Dorothy, an Addie obviously trying to catch Seth's eye. Oh, no! That girl would make the most of this.

Dorothy was racing on, "If I'd known you were here I'd have tried to contact

you somehow, but time was so short. Our tour is leaving for Te Anau later today. What a city. I'd have loved to have seen it at close quarters. As a child I was so fascinated when Cluny's mother used to tell us about South Horizon and their funny little Higgeldy-Piggeldy House. It was such a sad story, that poor young woman taking the chance to get away, and a very courageous one, in the condition she was in. But it all came out right. Such a happy lady. She said she had to be, for Cluny's sake, and later, for the others too. How did you get the chance of coming here, Georgina?"

Georgina was bereft of words but Seth came to life. He stepped forward, said, "Hullo, Addie. Fancy you being here, too. This is where we all ought to be murmuring: 'Small world, isn't it?' Aren't you going to introduce me, Georgina? . . . well, I'm Seth Oliphant of South Horizon where Cluny's mother lived for a few years then faded out of the picture. Isn't it interesting that my aunts went to the Isle of Wight to see if they could find any trace of Ellen and came across Georgina? We wanted to have our family

history written up and who better to do that than her"

Dorothy echoed, "Who better indeed? With her experience. Isn't coincidence lovely? And this is another . . . to be walking along here one moment, surprised to see a boat called *The Cluny* and the next to see you, Georgina. I don't think I'd realized your grandmother's name had anything to do with South Horizon."

Seth's voice held a dry inflection that got Georgina on the raw. "But of course Georgina knew that. She's a mine of information on the family, clan history and all. It's very much a Macpherson name, that. And her own second name!"

Addie said with a sidelong glance. "I find this most interesting. How odd you didn't mention the relationship that day, Georgina, when I was over with the tour. Especially when I mentioned *my* great-grandmother who should have married George."

Georgina was too numb to answer that but was most surprised to hear Seth reply, "Well, so *she* said. A bit of wishful thinking, Addie, I'd say. As far

as this family history is concerned Ellen was the one and only."

Addie's smile gave that the lie. "A lot of things have to be glossed over in family histories. They're written from one standpoint only. I daresay we'll achieve one some day and readers will have to make the best of conflicting ideas. That's if they ever reach library shelves."

Dorothy looked from one to the other and laughed, to ease the situation. "Can be ticklish. My mother once started to do ours but had to skim over her own mother's courting days. She was an Isle of Wight belle in the naughty nineties. No Lily Langtry, but I believe she had a very come-hither eye." She turned to Georgina, "And with your professional expertise, dear, you'll know exactly what to leave out."

Seth's voice was as smooth as silk. "She does, I assure you. She's already proved herself adept in that regard."

All of a sudden Georgina could bear no more. She said, "Well, I'm so glad I didn't miss you, Dorothy. I'm only sorry this has been so brief."

Seth agreed, "Yes, we could have had

you over at Horizon Bay. The aunts could have been most interested. How come you were here, Addie?"

She said, "Pure coincidence again. You know I work in with the tour companies as a local guide. A guy in the office just happened to mention one of the tourists would like to see Ludwigtown. She even skipped the famous mini-bus ride to Skipper's Canyon this afternoon. But she seems to have found it worthwhile. Glad to have been of use. And Georgina's closer connection with South Horizon has quite intrigued me. I would have been surprised to read it later, in the history."

"And that's some time off," said Seth. "Georgina may get it ready for publication by a Dunedin firm by February — I don't suppose she'll want to stay longer than that — but printing takes time even though it's just being done privately. I mean it doesn't have to be submitted for acceptance. Not like a novel. Well, see you sometime, Addie, and good to have met you, Mrs Charteris, it was most interesting."

He let Georgina clamber on board

herself, cast off as she waved the family friend goodbye. She stood looking back at the retreating shore-line till the launch headed out between the headlands and across the wide spread of waters. Then she turned and looked at Seth, at the wheel, every inch of his back, even, taut with anger. She found her voice. "We can't go back to Horizon till we've had this out. We can't."

His mouth was grim, his face set as she came up beside him. His voice was rasping, contemptuous. "Of course not. You're going to tell me exactly why you didn't say from the start that you were Ellen's daughter's grandchild. Before we have to face the family, who, heaven help them, think the world of you! I'm taking you to an isolated spot where we can have it out. Oh, not the idyllic cove I'd planned before you got shown up, where I'd hoped to tell you something that matters a great deal to me. At least I haven't to bother about that now. I'm taking you to Tawhiti, rather a grim place, but at least it's got a jetty and it's completely isolated."

Georgina felt unable to utter a sound.

She'd rather wait till they were ashore. There was silence for a while. Then Seth said, still in that savage tone. "What a fool I've been. All the signs were there. You said once your great-grandmother died before you were three but that you remembered her. You also said that your grandmother made you remember dates by saying her own mother was born in Queen Victoria's reign in the depression of the eighteen-eighties. I didn't dream then of that tying up with Ellen's birth, but I ought to have leapt to it when you knew about Hannah being the one to have got George to blow those rocks out. Talk about being dim. I even provided excuses for your lapse, didn't I? Never occurred to me to doubt you. Pah!"

Guilt kept Georgina silent.

* * *

They came to the dark indentation between the Campions' bay and theirs, the place where a river burst through forbidding heights to plunge down to the lake, the feature that was the barrier to a road ever existing between the two

properties. Seth tied up, single-handed, sprang ashore, didn't reach out a hand to her, strode along the stony beach, Georgina following. He stopped against a forbidding cliff, turned to face her. The bleakness of the surroundings was matched by the bleakness of his face. The fact that he didn't shout somehow emphasized the intensity of anger in him. "How could you? How could you do this to me? To us? If only, if only I'd trusted my first impressions and told the aunts it was just not on! I knew it was strange a girl should take this on and pay her own way. But you soon disarmed me. More than that, infatuated me, sabotaged my judgement."

She came to life. "I didn't set out to infatuate you — how dare you! I came to write the history of a place my great-grandmother spoke of as enchanting. I hoped to find it so. Instead, I've been *disenchanted*. I didn't want anyone to know I had any connection with the place in case they thought I had any motive other than what amounts to the prime interest of my life, my career . . . recording family histories.

This one, dropped so unexpectedly into my lap was *our own* history. When Eleanor and Sarah came seeking news of Ellen it wasn't just a coincidence to me, it was a minor miracle, and it was quite a revelation to find her memory revered here, that she wasn't just remembered as someone who had deserted a mother grieving for a son. I loved them immediately. I even kidded myself it was meant to be. One of the workings of Providence. And, I'm honest enough to admit it was going to be better for me to be away from the Southampton office just then because unfortunately Ward Selham was going to be my boss." She'd seen Seth angry before, but never sneering. "Oh yes, Selham! Your ex-fiancé!"

Georgina's eyes flashed, her hands clenched. "No! Not my ex-fiancé! Believe me, my infatuation didn't get as far as that. Thank God I found him out. He'd proposed, oh yes, but I'd asked for time to consider it. I turned him down. *He* wasn't infatuated, believe me. He was nothing but an opportunist and he came a cropper!"

Seth made a brushing-away gesture. "Anyway, that's nothing to do with us."

Georgina hadn't stamped a foot since childhood but she did now. "Of course it isn't . . . I didn't bring him into this. You did. To think I used to feel men were logical!"

Again the gesture. "But why didn't you say your great-grand-mother was Ellen? After all, we thought it sweet she called her daughter Cluny. And in case you are going to say it was because I was so against the idea, don't! Sarah and Eleanor stayed with you long before that and even later you said nothing, in fact my opposition seemed to make you even keener. Why?"

She held up a hand, "I'll tell you why if you'll listen. Because I longed to do it. Personally. I so wanted to see where Ellen had lived, to see the original of that painting. I grew up knowing every hill, every cliff, and Ellen's children passed all her stories on. You went to see the places in Scotland your forebears came from. Was it so strange I wanted to see this? You even visited the Macpherson country."

His voice was reluctant. "Yes, I can understand that. And even if at first you didn't want to tell, surely when you came to know us, you could have done?"

She said, desolately, "I don't expect you to believe me but I was ready to tell you. Especially that night you were trying to find out my middle name. I didn't want to tell you in front of anyone, even Prue. But we seemed to come so — so close that night; when Prue went to bed I decided this was the right moment but you switched on the radio and we heard the news about that claimant in the North Island and I just couldn't. You'd have thought the same about me — that I'd come to snuff out how wealthy the estate was . . . and that case is still going on. I've felt like screaming every time it's on the news. and — and — " her voice faltered, "It seemed a pity to spoil what — what was happening between us."

"But there's no parallel here. That was an elder son, the lawful heir, deserted by his father. A present-day thing and hell for everyone concerned. It threatened the viability of an estate,

the livelihood of two or three families. Ellen had wanted nothing. She walked out, practically destitute. She was entitled to something *then*. Heavens, it was before World War One. Look, we'll refund you the airfare, pay you for your work."

She said fiercely. "Don't be so absurd. I embarked on this on what appears now to have been a mad whim. An adventure. I'll carry it out. Don't tell the others. It's unnecessary. I'll finish it as soon as possible. Oddly enough, Seth Oliphant, your reaction to this has somehow justified my secrecy. Maybe I was wise not to tell. At first it was just being cautious about Henry and Robert — I thought they were the joint owners because of their Macpherson wives and mightn't even want the history written. But you were suspicious from the start. I can't think why."

"It was because — no — let that go. There's been enough anger and recrimination between us. It doesn't matter. We've got to go back to Horizon and somehow carry on. I won't have the season of goodwill overlaid with disillusionment for the family."

She said crisply, "Suits me. I'll finish my job and go. I'll gradually hint I need to go home. Right now I'd like to be there."

She studied the stones at her feet, looked up. Seth had a strange look. The rage gone, he seemed bereft. He was probably experiencing the same emptiness she was. He drew himself up, gestured towards the headland. "How odd to think that there they don't know anything of this. And it's going to stay that way, do you hear? If disclosures must be made, at least not now." He stopped, then said, "But what you don't know is that I, all unknowing, have hideously complicated things by — Oh, let that go. That's my problem. Let's get going and by the time we come into Horizon Bay we ought to be able to present a normal appearance."

By the time Georgina got to bed that night she felt so battered by the stress of the day and the strain of acting naturally, she fell asleep the instant her head hit the pillow.

* * *

The next few days were sheer torture to Georgina. It was made worse by Seth seeming to maliciously enjoy tantalising her by pseudo-affectionate gestures. Only when no-one else was there did his eyes meet hers despisingly . . . If only all was over, especially this travesty of Christmas joy. Then Seth would tell the others she supposed. Or would he wait till she had finished her task and gone? But even if her heart wasn't in it, she was glad of the multitude of tasks connected with the season. Prue got her to help with the house decorations. The glitter and sparkle seemed to mock Georgina.

The men cleared the big woolshed and every corner was swept clean. There'd be the dance on Boxing Night after the children's party. They didn't call it a barn dance, they called it a woolshed-hop. The men took forays into the bush for ferns and the scarlet rata and native mistletoe, standing them in huge tubs of water, in the shade, till they could be entwined in the rafters. Prudence said happily when she stopped Georgina going over, "Seth doesn't want you to see it till it's all finished, dear girl. He's been

planning it that way for weeks."

Georgina managed a laugh. "I thought he was being very secretive."

Prudence took her seriously. "Yes, he's been moody, but that's natural. Georgina, there's something he must tell you. Try to make it easy for him, won't you. He's been very uptight about it."

Georgina turned, put an arm about Prudence. "Perhaps you're worrying about nothing. He may even decide he doesn't need to tell me. Don't let it spoil Christmas, Prue. Let him leave it till after New Year, if he must tell me." (By then they might know she was returning home).

She felt Prue tense herself as she said, "No, the time factor is complicated now. It will have to be before — oh, here he is."

The phone rang. "Georgina, would you answer that? My hands are sticky." She picked up the phone, listened, said, "Speaking. The Post Office? Oh, I see. How very awkward. But it's certainly very good of you to take this trouble. I'll get across somehow. If they're too busy here, I might even find the Campions

or MacQueens are making a trip. Yes, I can see it must be attended to right away. What on earth can it be? Is there a sender's name on it? . . . Oh, Prenderby and Emmington. That gives me a clue, but I thought all that was washed up six months or more ago. Just a moment," she put her hand over the mouthpiece. "What did you say, Seth?"

"What ever this is, it's our responsibility to get you across. I'll take you now."

Back into the phone she said, "It's okay. Someone can take me now. See you soon and thanks a million."

She swung round to Seth. "Terribly sorry. So disrupting. Some mail has come for me. It was just being put into our bag for tomorrow's launch and they saw it had come in by the fast service section marked: 'For urgent attention and return by fastest means possible.' I'm sorry."

"Nonsense. The Post Office will realize if it's not attended to now, urgency would be lost. There's a four-day holiday coming up. It may not be bad news."

"Oh, it can't be. It's from a legal firm in Cowes who dealt with Miss de

Carteret's affairs. I didn't think anything else could possibly crop up."

"Oh. Look, maybe it can be faxed back." He hesitated then said, "I take it this is to do with the settling of her estate?"

"Yes, must be. Talk about legal wheels grinding slowly!"

There was a pause, almost as if he expected her to volunteer more. She responded to it, said, "I can't even hazard a guess. Do you want your lunch first?"

"No. We can eat over there afterwards. You don't need to change, do you? Right, neither do I. Come on."

Prue said fondly, "Don't worry, Georgina, it's probably some stupid technicality. What ever it is, Seth will iron it out."

Her son said, "If I'm allowed to." He picked up his wallet, stuffed it into the pocket of his shorts.

They didn't talk much on the trip across. The Post Office was thronged with people despatching last minute greetings and parcels. Seth took a look at the queues and said, "Wait here. It's bound

to be held over in the mailroom. That's upstairs."

In no time he was back with a long envelope. She slit it open, drew out a document with a letter attached. He said, "I'll leave you to read it in private. I'll be just outside." She clutched him. "No, don't. You know your way round here, you might be able to short-cut the return of this. I don't like the look of those queues." A writing-desk became free and she moved towards it, scanned the letter quickly, said, "Wouldn't it! Some paper requiring my signature got overlooked. One of those things where every page must be signed. But I've got to sign it in front of it a solicitor or a J.P. — how long will it take me to get an appointment on a busy day like this?"

"It's okay. I know the very chap. A J.P. who's semi-retired. Lives near the Forty-niner. Look, I think you ought to digest that letter a bit more thoroughly, make sure what you're signing. Read the fine print on the document. Make sure you want to sign it. You might even want legal advice. I can fix it if you do. Signing hastily might even cost you money."

She looked up at him, the grey eyes clear and frank. "Oh, no, it couldn't cost me anything, Seth. I signed over the whole property to Fanchon's nieces and nephews almost as soon as the will was read."

Seth's voice was a bark clearly audible over the strong buzz of conversation from over half a hundred voices.

"You what?"

Georgina jumped, clutched him, said, "Shush! What's the matter with you? Of course I did. I wasn't going to take what didn't belong to me morally. It was an awful shock to me when I heard what she'd done. I had visions of a court case, of the will being contested, of having people think I'd feathered my nest and influenced her. Besides, her real heirs were folk I had the greatest respect and affection for. Seth, what are you looking at me like that for?"

He shook his head as if to clear it, seized her arm, said, "Let's get out of here. You can sit on that seat outside and digest that and I'll do some hard re-thinking."

Georgina didn't say a word. Couldn't.

It was beyond her. What did he have to re-think?

He sat her down. "First thing attend to that document. Read it closely. Sorry you haven't got more privacy but I won't look over your shoulder."

Again that clear look. "I'm going to show it to you to make sure I know what they want. Though it seems at first glance nothing I didn't know before."

They were both quick readers. "Letter's straightforward. Now the document."

"I sometimes find the legal phrasing difficult but I want you to check."

As he finished he said, "No problem here, nothing like as complicated as when I became Stephen's heir. I had to make sure the family shares were just and equitable. As it was I felt I was being too generously treated."

"I'm sure you needn't have felt that, but in your case there was a close relationship between you and your stepfather. Prue told me once that your management of the estate lengthened Stephen's life."

"Well, that's something to my credit. Needs to be, after the way I misjudged

you. But this isn't the time or the place to go into that."

It didn't take long, the papers were signed and despatched after the witnessing and they became aware of hunger. The snack-bar was crowded. They even had to share a table. They came out to intense heat, jostling crowds, the tar melting on the roads.

Seth said, "Right. We go to the Forty-niner."

"Why not straight back?"

"Because I've something to tell you."

"Seth, I'm not sure you should. It's about your father, isn't it? You may have thought you ought to tell me, once, but it's different now, since Dorothy Charteris gave my secret away."

"It isn't about my father. It's about us. It can't be told here. Till we get there, ask no questions, please. I'm not looking forward to it. I don't know how you'll react."

She said drily, "I know the feeling. I'd dreaded your reaction to what I knew I must tell you, for weeks. Though it was worse than anything I'd expected."

He groaned. "Don't — "

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He groaned. "Don't — "

She glanced at his face as they strode along. Gone was that dominant look. He looked — what? Vulnerable, something one didn't associate with Oliphant of South Horizon. She couldn't take it. She said, "Perhaps my having recently experienced just that will help me understand."

"I hope to God that's right." He unlatched the gate and the mellowed peace of this old-time refuge from the bare harshness of the goldrush days was all about them in dappled leaf shadows and welcome shade, full of the scent of roses and spicy pinks, the sound of birds calling and the magic of butterfly wings. Seth said jerkily, "It'll be too hot inside. We'll go down to the summerhouse." He led the way. Going over the tiny bridge she found herself wanting to linger, to reach out, to touch him. Was he thinking of that kiss they had shared here? They went in. He took out a handkerchief and flicked it over the rough papery bark of the *manuka*. She made an impatient gesture. "That doesn't matter. I'm in denim shorts. Tell me what you have to tell me, Seth, and get it over."

He turned sideways on the seat, an arm along the back of it, looking at her unflinchingly. "Miss de Carteret left you her property but you didn't accept it? Right?" She blinked. "Yes, that's what all this was about. It's ancient history now. Or ought to be. Not all her property, just her very lovely and valuable house. She got it into her head that I'd write fiction too, there in ideal surroundings. She never married. Her fiancé was killed at Dunkirk. Seemed to have been a one-man woman. Said I was like a daughter to her. She had this dream of someone following her footsteps. It was a shock to me when the solicitors sent for me. I turned it down on the spot. They advised me to think it over, that her other assets were going to the relatives. I wouldn't even consider it. I didn't feel free till the family was told. But it had an unfortunate repercussion later. In my personal life. But that's nothing to do with this."

"Hasn't it, Georgina? I think it has."

Two lines appeared between her coppery brows. "That isn't what we came here for. You wanted to tell me something."

"That's part of it. The repercussion. You mean Ward Selham's reaction to your decision to refuse the legacy?"

She boggled. "Ward Selham? Well, yes. But it didn't happen at the time. In fact it was just before Eleanor and Sarah came back from Europe. But how could you surmise that? I didn't even mention it to your aunts. It didn't seem right to gossip about Ward even though he behaved like a skunk. There was no need to. When they said they couldn't expect Mr. Selham to be pleased they were taking me away from him for three months, I told them it was all off. That he'd asked me to marry him and I'd turned him down. Seth, you did believe me when I told you the other day he had never been my ex-fiancé? I hope you didn't doubt my word — ?"

He said quickly, "No, you were very convincing about that. However angry I was with you otherwise, I realized Ward had exaggerated that relationship to me."

Now it was Georgina's turn to say: "What?" in tones almost as loud as Seth's earlier. "But when could he have told you

that? You only called in at the London Office to ask where your aunts were."

He looked grim. "Let me get it out. He immediately said he was going to Southampton himself and offered me a lift. I was rather surprised when this rather formal guy suddenly unburdened himself to me. No, hear me out, Georgina. He said his fiancée had been left a valuable property, had promised him she'd sell it and the money could go into buying him a partnership in the firm, which would benefit them both. Then she suddenly changed her mind, broke the engagement and left him in the devil of a hole trying to raise the capital. He said he ought to warn me that you never did anything without a motive. That you always, somehow, feathered your own nest. That you'd got carried away, first of all, by the fact that you wormed your way into the Salvatore family, and scored a huge bonus. Then Miss de Carteret left you her house. That you'd agreed to putting the money from that into a partnership for him, then ratted on it. He said you were likely to try the same tactics wherever you went. He felt he should put me

on my guard. Now, you can storm at me the way I stormed at you across the lake. I must have no discrimination at all to believe a fellow like that. Over to you. Let it rip!"

She said instead, slowly, "I had no discrimination either, for even fancying him. I think that rather than being stormed at, you're entitled to some explanation. No wonder you arrived breathing fire and brimstone. If I hadn't been so stupid about revealing my descent from Ellen, it wouldn't have got so complicated, though I did feel I ought to ask Cluny first. It was her secret. The offer of coming to New Zealand was tempting, then the shock of hearing how Ward had found out about the legacy and had told the partners, made the way of escape from the office all the more desirable. I felt all mixed up, so said nothing to the aunts. It had been a shock to know Ward had just asked me to marry him because of the legacy. There'd been a leak from the Cowes office, obviously. But I'd turned it down a week before he ever asked me out."

Seth's jaw dropped. "Before he — How

did you find out?" She told him the whole thing. He took both her hands in his, said unsteadily, "And then I walked over your lacerated feelings in hobnailed boots. Forgive me, Georgina."

She laughed, to his surprise, in pure merriment. "Oh, bosh! I didn't have a broken heart. I'd already decided he wasn't the man I wanted to spend the rest of my life with. I told the aunts that. Ask them if you're still not sure."

"I will not. They'd have a piece of me. Georgina, none of them needs to know about Ward giving me a lift down, *and* an earful. Things can just go back to what they were."

Her face grew grave. "Can they, Seth? But you still think me devious for not telling you who I was. Nothing I can say will alter that. At the time it seemed best to me. That's that."

"But it can cease to matter. I wouldn't have made so much of it if it hadn't been for that conniving hound. You came away so it wouldn't be awkward for him. *He* tried to queer your pitch with us."

She still had a crease between her brows. "But Seth, that day at Tawhiti you

said it had made a hideous complication.
What?"

She was surprised he didn't come out with it immediately. After all, this was confession time, he looked rueful, finally said, "I'll have to let that go for now, I don't want to act rashly again — there's that other thing to tell you first. I've got two or three days yet. Let me do my re-thinking." He went to draw her to him, "Instead, let's add to our former pleasant memories of this place."

She drew back. "Not yet, Seth. I — I haven't quite got the confidence I had once."

He stiffened, resenting her withdrawal, she knew, then with the whimsical twist of that shapely mouth she admired so much, said, "You need time to get over the way the men in your life have treated you, don't you? Then so be it."

They did some quite unnecessary extra shopping, especially some very expensive tinselly decorations. "You can't have too much for that vast woolshed," Seth said, "and just look at that Swiss doll . . . her plaits would be the very thing for a new tail for our wooden donkey. I could comb

them out. Stephen once renewed the tail for the twins. The first Christmas they had had a father figure for."

"Oh, you must let me help you tease it out."

"No. You're getting no previews. I'll show you the night before Christmas Eve. It's better with the lights on."

So in harmony with only a little apprehension left they came into Horizon Bay.

Prue said, "Seth, there was an important message came through for you. I took a note but I want to explain it. Let's go into the office."

Georgina said quickly, "Oh, I do hope no plans were overset by my taking Seth away." Prue shook her head. "No, everything's fine, only we'll have to leave you on your own tonight to discuss this. Over at Sarah's. The others will be there." Georgina thought nothing of it. The estate was run as a company and these meetings often took place. She looked across at the tree, said, "Goodness, that pile of presents gets larger and larger. And why have you covered them up with that tablecloth?"

"Because they've now got labels on

them and young Guy's just too inquisitive. I caught him investigating the ones in the schoolroom cupboard. Georgina, the little ones who still believe in Santa think the presents in their stockings are from him but they know we all exchange gifts later. Just see that you don't revert to childhood and start prying."

"As if she would," said Seth. "I once thought she might be a designing minx but now I think her the soul of integrity. At least most of the time." He even had the nerve to chuckle.

Prue complained, "I can't think how you get away with saying such outrageous things, son. No wonder Georgina was once tempted to smack your face."

He looked blank. "When — ?"

Prue twinkled. "The day Guy caught you kissing her in the schoolroom." Seth seemed himself again. "Some mothers have tact. I don't know what I did to deserve one like you."

But Georgina wasn't quite herself. She wouldn't be till Christmas was safely over and she knew what the dear folk here thought of it all. She dared not hope all would be accepted or understood.

* * *

A different mood seemed to prevail next day, the spirit of Christmas she supposed. What young-hearted people these were. The Seatons and Raeburns and Prue Macpherson were as starry-eyed as the children. Prudence sang as she fared forth into the summer garden with a trug and scissors gathering roses and delphiniums, larkspur and shasta daisies for the vases. No room was left out. She even took a tall silver vase of red rosebuds into Ellen and George's room. She put them on a small table under their portraits. Georgina had followed her in.

"How sweet of you, Prue. Touches like this keep their memories alive." Prue looked down at the flowers, touched one caressingly, bent to savour its perfume. "Nothing is as evocative as scent to stir the memory. I can smell the red roses of my wedding bouquet as my father took me up the aisle, right now." She went out, her smile still lingering.

Georgina didn't follow. She too bent to the roses and knew gladness. She remembered Prue telling her she'd married

Stephen in the depths of winter at the chapel on the Twin Hills estate and had said a storm sprang up on the lake so the Ludwig minister's boat had had to put in at Echo Bay for shelter, making him an hour late. Certainly not the season for roses. What ever had happened to that first marriage, not all the memories were sad. Perhaps some day she might be able to tell Seth that.

They had a late dinner and dallied over it, talking. Seth made them extra coffee. "As soon as it's dark I'm taking you over to see the woolshed."

She said, "It gets dark so late now and you've got such an early start tomorrow meeting that first plane with the children's grandparents on. Why not leave it till tomorrow night?"

"Not on your life. That's the night, Christmas Eve, for the children's carol service. It'll be like Trafalgar Square. I want you on your own when you first see it."

Presently came twilight, flinging purple shadows down on Mount Serenity and enfolding the lake in dimness. "Right, my girl. Go up and don suitable garments for

one of the sights of the year."

She came down in a simple white sunfrock, shoulders and arms bare, with thonged sandals on her slim brown feet. She felt there was magic abroad, walking across to the woolshed door.

He drew her in and switched on the lights, his hand tucked into the crook of her elbow, his eyes on her face. The men had done their work well. Pine branches sprinkled with imitation snow, the red of the rata and the equally scarlet native mistletoe, mossy logs brought in from the bush, every crevice springing tiny ferns. At the far end great trusses of hay were grouped and a full-size manger of rough planks was standing there, with hay peeping out from under covers where lay a swathed doll. Nearby a couple of hay-bales formed a crude chair, draped with a blue blanket, ready no doubt, for one of the farm wives to sit in, as Mary might have done. In the straw on the floor where rosemary sprigs were scattered, stood some half-sized animals, carved out of wood and covered with sheep fleeces, black-and-white calfskins, and a deer-pelt adorned the little donkey

with the teased-out tail. When that long-ago Alastair had fashioned the first ones he'd never have dreamed they'd last this long and be added to. That was what tradition was all about. She said so, eyes shining.

Seth nodded, slipped his arm about her shoulders, "Imagine how wonderful it was for Mother to bring us here, a secure and happy environment."

She turned against him, put out both hands, gripped his upper arms, said, "I think that's what you want to tell me, Seth, isn't it? About your father and mother? Their broken marriage, if that's what it was? Families do break up. Need it matter?"

He caught her closer, looked down into her face, said, "Oh, how like you that is in spite of the way I misunderstood you. You're wanting to make it easy for me to tell. No wonder I love you, Georgina Innes. Oh, I can't go on telling you about *that*. It would spoil this moment. Girl, when I think of how I tried to stop you coming here, I'm aghast. Never to have known you, loved you, touched you. Not to have found this kinship of spirit. Do

you — I mean can you — after the way I reacted in Ludwigtown? Can you ever — ?" He stopped, sought for words, failed.

"Can I love you? Need you ask? Nothing else matters, Seth, you idiot!"

He gazed at her, then the gravity of his face broke up. She waited, an impish smile on her lips. He seized her shoulders, shook her. "You fiend! You're completely ruining my proposal. You once said I was an articulate man. Now I can't find the right words. I didn't even want to propose till I told you about my father. I've lost the thread of what I wanted to tell and you've just called me an idiot!"

Her eyes were still gleaming with mischief. "Do words really matter? Here's the perfect setting. I'm accepting you here and now if that's really a proposal. Surely it's a waste of all that mistletoe on the rafters above us. Don't you think, Seth of South Horizon, we could talk later?"

He didn't bother to look up, he caught her to him, tilted her chin, kissed her as he had never kissed her before. The familiar magic feathered along

Georgina's veins. She could feel his heart racing as fast as she knew hers was. Through the uncurtained window the stars looked down out of a sky that was deepening to blue velvet. One star seemed to outshine all the rest. Finally Seth looked up at it, said rather unsteadily, "Star of Bethlehem, even if this is the Southern Hemisphere. It's led us together." He kissed her again, then looked rueful. "But what needs to be said, must be said now, my darling. It wasn't a broken marriage. Worse than that. The complete disintegration of character. My father's character. It broke Mother's heart. Stephen put it together for her again, thank God.

"Those years between were full of sorrow and struggle for her. I've got to get it out, Georgina, the reason why I didn't see my father after I was two, although he didn't die till I was eight, was because he was in prison for white-collar fraud. The twins were born after he was convicted. Mother took them to see him — or rather for him to see them — several times in their first year. She didn't take me."

Georgina said swiftly, the suspicion of tears in her voice, "Because she didn't want you to remember talking to your father in a prison. How like Prue."

He shook his head. "No. He wouldn't let her take me and as soon as the twins were old enough to know how strange it was, he wouldn't allow them to be brought either, dearly as I believed he loved us. He seemed to have some idea he wouldn't live to come out, despite Mother assuring him they would make a new life together, away from his old friends, away from the horses that had been his downfall. He said it wasn't fair for any child to carry memories of that. What are you looking like that for?"

She clutched him closer, looking up into his eyes as if she must make him share her feelings, "Don't you see? Oh, Seth, a man capable of thinking that wasn't all bad. Don't you remember how glad I was we found something likeable about Hannah? Her compassion for animals over-riding her meanness. It's a parallel. This doesn't affect us. How could you think it would?"

His eyes were sombre. "Don't you see?

You, because of your work, writing up family histories, will have this woven into the ancestry of *your* children, *our* children. My father ruined lives. Because of his gambling addiction he reduced decent people to poverty and insecurity. Mother sold everything we possessed to pay some back, far more than was demanded."

"Oh, Seth! I'm only sorry because of what Prue, darling Prue, must've gone through. No home and with three of you to support. You can't put your father's wrongdoing against all the other Oliphant forebears' admirable characters. *You're* what matters. *Prue* is what matters. I don't give a brass farthing about it. I'm proud to become your wife, Seth, *and* to be the daughter-in-law of a man who wanted no shadow of his misdeeds to fall on his children's memories."

"Oh, Georgina, I never hoped for such understanding." He brought his hand round in between them, said, "It was so odd. I had a whim to wear this ring of his tonight, I didn't analyse it. Just felt I must. I found it hard to get on even my little finger. He wasn't a tiller

of the soil like me. He had worn it as a wedding-ring. Though it was only an old family signet-ring, really."

She brought his hand up towards the light. "It's the family crest?"

"Yes, a falcon at perch proper."

She said, "I'm glad you didn't change your name, Seth. I expect your mother felt if you took Stephen's it would save you from any stigma. But you kept it and made it stand for something, Oliphant of South Horizon. You were right. Can you get it off?"

"It won't be easy, why?"

"Never mind, just try."

He spat on it, twisted, got it off, put it into her hand. She said steadfastly, "Slip it on to my ring finger, Seth. I know we'll have to have a customary engagement ring and this may be too loose for me, but I want to wear it tonight. We'll go into Prue's room and show her and because I know she loved your father dearly once because of something she said today, she'll feel he has a share in this too. Our happiness."

It was a little loose. Not much. She said dreamily, "Someday our son will

wear it." Suddenly, held there against his heart she realized with gladness he'd never mind old Hannah's blood running in his children's veins. That had been a casual remark, not meant to be taken seriously; but he swept on, laughing exultantly, as he had every right to do, "When I think of the trepidation with which I approached this, I underestimated you. I felt that our recent quarrel and my treatment of you might have made it harder to take . . . thank you, my love." A little pause then he said whimsically, "And now let us sample some of the delights of being newly engaged."

Georgina, bemused, let him lead her over to the hay-bales near the crib. "A very comfortable seat," he said. She laughed, "But there's no mistletoe on this rafter."

"We can dispense with mistletoe," he said, but that kiss lasted just two seconds. The door flew open and there stood Nick and Greg. They looked amazed. Then they both roared with laughter. Nick said, "Well, of all the cunning hounds! We've been looking all over for you,

boss, then saw the lights on here. What a merry Christmas you're having, while we slave!" Seth held a hand up. "Now, no snide remarks from you two. They would be entirely out of place. We've just got ourselves engaged, but not a soul is to know it yet. Hear that. Not a soul!"

Georgina was astounded. "Why not?"

He grinned. "Because I want your father's approval first. It may sound outdated but with this distance between us he's had no chance to look me over. I felt it must be done."

"Oh, dear. That's not going to be easy. He might be in Florida for Christmas but he might not have been able to get out of the jungle yet."

"I should have said I'm just waiting for his approval. I wrote him three weeks ago. I cribbed your Granny's address off a letter I mailed for you in our bag. To Mrs. C. Edwardes. I sent it care of her." Only Georgina knew he had emphasized the initial.

Into the silence Georgina was reduced to Greg said, "Well, congratulations will have to be put on hold at the moment. There's an emergency. Carl's heifer has

got herself wedged in that new rubbish trench we dug out yesterday. Come on."

From the sublime to the ridiculous described it perfectly. Seth barked: "But the cattle are two paddocks distant."

Nick nodded gloomily. "Pity we ever let Carl hand-rear that one. Apart from following him like a lap-dog and even right into their kitchen once, she's now taken to jumping fences. And there were some luscious peelings in that trench. Fortunately she's very tightly wedged. Can't do herself much harm. But it'll take time."

Georgina said, "Whatever will you do? Devise some sort of sling and lift her off with that crane thing?"

Seth shook his head. "No, she's in calf. She could abort with fright. I'll have to get the ditch-digger out and scoop out ahead of her. Make steps or a ramp for her to walk up. I'll have to change."

"So will I," said Georgina.

"You don't have to come, love. It will take ages."

"You couldn't keep me away," said Georgina. True enough. It would postpone her alarm at what Seth had just revealed.

How would Dad react? Oh, he wouldn't be judgemental, but he didn't even know yet, none of them over there did, that she'd been found out for who she was. She was going to write them after Christmas. Even if they were all together in Florida, as she hoped, it wouldn't be easy to tell on the phone.

Why did it all have to happen now? It was late to start with. A big job lay ahead, and Seth was leaving so early tomorrow morning to meet the children's grandparents. But now an animal was in trouble.

And this was supposed to be the happiest day of her life, wasn't it?

10

SETH called out to his mother, "We're just off to rescue that thrice-accursed heifer of Carl's. She's wedged in the new ditch. What did you say, Mother?" He stuck his head into Prue's doorway as Georgina emerged from hers, clad in old slacks and a checked shirt flowing over them, and he said, laughing, "No, it's okay. She knows the whole thing, my dear Mama, and we're engaged and she's wearing Father's ring. She insisted on it. The Rubicon is crossed. Now, go back to sleep . . . we've got to hurry."

"But son, what about — ?"

He laughed. "I've a feeling that'll go off well too. Come on, Georgina."

She pushed him aside, bent over Prue, kissed her, said, "How could I pass up the chance of a mother-in-law like you? See you in the morning," and they rushed out.

Georgina was amazed at their expertise

in getting the animal out. It took time even bringing the machinery over, but then, without hurry so not to fill the little heifer with fear, cut a succession of steps in the pasture towards Pandora. Carl had called her that after a lesson in the schoolroom last year.

Seth grunted, "Might've known it was fatal to call her that. She's been a box of tricks ever since Carl reared her. Look at her, positively enjoying all the fuss."

Georgina, in the light of the tractor they'd trained on the field of operations, was talking to her soothingly. They had to slip a halter and rope round her to prevent her from trying to scramble up too soon, once she'd cottoned on to what they were doing. The digger reversed away, Nick led Pandora out, and took her off to a cowshed where she was locked in for the night.

Then a feeling of anti-climax descended on Georgina. What an aftermath to a proposal! As they neared the house Seth said, "Don't ask me anything now about writing your father, my darling, it's nearly three o'clock and I'm leaving on the launch at eight. No, you aren't to come

with me. We'll have to bide our time. That was the hideous complication I mentioned. I'd written him to tell him about my father. I thought he had a right to know. Then that scene by the launch happened, and on the heels of that, I found out about Ward. We'll just have to wait till we hear from your father." Looking up at him in the brilliant starlight she saw the side of his mouth quirk up in a way it had, often, when he was amused. Now why? Yet it somehow reassured her.

What a glorious Christmas Eve morning. Seth was up ridiculously early, made himself breakfast, called up goodbye and was away with Doug down to the boat. Prue and Georgina had a wonderful talk before breakfast, Georgina sitting on the edge of Prue's bed. They had shed a few tears for the sorrows of yesterday but Prue was singing to herself as she gathered gypsophila to enhance some apricot roses for the Little Parlour.

She had persuaded Georgina into a silk skirt and top with turquoise tonings. "To match the lake," she said. Georgina told her she was mad. "I thought I'd fill in

the time weeding that bed over there. I wanted to keep these denim shorts on."

"Not on the first day of your engagement. I want you looking beautiful for Seth when he brings the boat in."

"I don't really have to be there. It's only Linda and Beth's parents."

Prue looked shocked. "You'll be the first thing Seth will want to light his eyes on when he berths. The very idea!"

"Well, don't expect me to fall into his arms on the jetty. He said last night we were to keep it a secret till he hears from my father. I still haven't got over that shock. I'm not going to ring Florida on Christmas Day. They can ring me."

At that moment there was a ring.

Georgina looked apprehensive. "I hope that's not Dad now." But it was only Guy's mother. "Georgina, it's Guy. He says he's just got to see you, and I'm sure it's something on his conscience. He couldn't sleep last night, now he says you might be able to put it right. Could you see him and then hustle him down to the jetty? Mum and Dad will be so disappointed if he's not there."

Georgina chuckled. "Send him down.

It's probably nothing."

Prue was cross. "Don't let him waste your time. I'll go on down, he might feel less embarrassed without me there."

Guy came with reluctant feet. Even if he felt she could help he evidently didn't like confessing some misdeed.

She held out a hand, "Come on, tell me what's wrong."

"Can we go in the schoolroom?"

"Sure." She shut the door in case any of the single men came in. "Now what?"

Guy said, "You're going to be awful mad and Seth's going to be madder still."

She said, "He's in a very good mood, I promise you. So'm I."

It came in a rush. He pointed at the cupboard. "I saw Seth hiding a lot of presents in there and I thought I'd just take a peek, feel them and try to guess what was in them. One was a funny shape. I thought it was a cuddly toy for the wee ones. I took the wrapping off and it was. Only the card fell out clean into that jar of red poster paint. You could still see the writing — it was

an awful mess, and it was for you, from Seth."

"A cuddly toy? It couldn't be for me."

"It was. It said, 'To Georgina. Not as good as the real thing but much safer to stroke. Love from Seth.' It was a tiger."

Light burst on Georgina. She gave such a peal of laughter that Guy looked a little happier. "It's a funny thing to give you isn't it?" To Guy's surprise she hugged him. "Honey, it's a fun thing. A joke we once had when I said I'd like to stroke a tiger between the eyes. I'll get him to one side and tell him why the card's all paint. He won't be a bit cross. He'll think it's a good joke. I'll hide the tiger and card till I can tell. Quickly, because I promised Prue I'd be at the jetty."

Hand in hand they ran down to see *The Cluny* just coming round the point, joined the small crowd.

As they drew near she saw Seth wasn't at the wheel, Doug was. Seth had his arm around the shoulders of a tall, white-haired woman standing with a hand on

the rail, to steady her perhaps. A woman with an air of elegance, whose white hair still showed glints of copper in the bright morning sun. She had grey eyes.

Georgina knew, that would be showing flecks of blue and green with sheer excitement . . . as well there might be . . . Prudence had caught Georgina's arm to steady her. There seemed to be quite a lot of people on the launch but they were just a blur to Georgina, because there was a mist in front of her eyes. She felt rooted to the spot. The engine died, the boat steadied.

Then Seth was assisting his passenger ashore and when he made sure her feet were safely on the planking, he laughed, his eyes meeting Georgina's incredulous eyes and he shouted, "Merry Christmas, Georgina, look what I've brought you . . . Cluny!"

Georgina came out of her trance, moved in a little rush, quite unaware tears were falling down her cheeks, and caught the beloved figure to her, "Oh, Cluny, Cluny!" she cried, "the perfect Christmas gift!"

A voice above her said, "I feel

overlooked. We both do. Goodmorning, daughter darling!" Her father's voice. They came ashore. Not much could be said now. There were too many people present, most of them strangers. No doubt Seth would have told those other visitors he was bringing, that this was a surprise visit by Georgina's people, but now they were greeting their own. There must be no hint that a very tangled web lay behind this. Georgina was engulfed by her parents' arms. "Humphrey couldn't make it," they told her. "He couldn't leave his Florida girl-friend." Everyone was talking at once, Sarah and Eleanor were trying to convey how happy they were to welcome Georgina's parents to Horizon and added, "And to have Cluny. The name we first saw on Ellen's tombstone and loved the thought of it. Fancy Georgina being afraid to tell us Cluny was her own grandmother. But Seth explained it all beautifully the other night when we met to discuss it. We knew he was inviting her people to spend Christmas here if they possibly could." James and Louise Innes beamed on them all. The others dispersed.

Georgina put out a hand to Seth under cover of the chat. He bent to her ear, said, "All hurdles taken. Your dad's just like you. He got me aside at the airport and said: 'Family skeletons went out with crinolines and tophats, dear boy. Proud to have you in our family.'" And he added, "Thank God you know now who Georgina is. We've been in a flap ever since we got the invitation. That's all for now."

As they came up from the lake-shore, Cluny stopped dead and gazed her fill. "Oh, it's so exactly as Mother described it — a wider view than the painting. And real-life, sparkling and breathing. A house all higgeldy-piggeldy, and that cliff's got to be the Echoing Cliff, hasn't it? Mount Serenity . . . a blue-green lake, truly too beautiful for forgetting she used to say." Seth's eyes met Georgina's, remembering. Cluny looked to her right, "Oh, that's the loosestone wall they built together to recall the stone walls they saw on the first part of their honeymoon." Prue exclaimed delightedly, "Oh, we didn't know that. Oh, Cluny, you'll be able to add new dimensions to the history.

You'll be able to tell us all the things Ellen treasured in memory. I could've understood it had she wanted to just let the past recede."

Cluny said positively, "What receded were the unhappinesses . . . she had such a laughter-loving resilient nature. Even into her great old age. We grew up somehow knowing South Horizon. Not that she dreamed any of us would ever see it. I feel so close to her today, as if she knows."

"I'm sure she does, Mother," said Louise Innes. "The way she talked to us when we were young, of family traditions, of lasting things, gave us in some way I don't quite understand, a sense of continuity, of immortality."

Prue caught Louise's hand. "Oh, how fortunate we are to have you here as well as your daughter. Ever since Seth discovered that Georgina was the descendant of the Cluny mentioned on the grave I've known such impatience. We were, at first, simply glad to know Ellen had found happiness. Pierre must've been a wonderful man."

Seth said, "Mother, let's move inside.

We've all the time there is in front of us to discuss the whys and wherefores. We must get these folk sitting down, having a cup of tea."

As they relaxed in the sunny parlour Cluny said, "Now, the limelight's been on me long enough. Now it ought to be on Seth and Georgina so newly engaged. I'd had my strong suspicions about him, from Georgina's letters. I don't think she knew how full they were of him. We were so impatient for her to come out into the open. Some of her secrecy mystified me but it's always been thus, I suppose, one generation not quite understanding the ways of the young. But I was very reassured when this young man conformed to the traditions of my own day and approached her father first. So here's to Seth and Georgina." She raised her cup, the rose-sprinkled tea-set item that Ellen had brought here in Edwardian times.

Cluny filled Sarah and Eleanor's cup of happiness too when she said: "It's wonderful to meet the daughters of the little Laura my mother loved so much. She sweetened the time Mother spent

here. That's why she called my younger sister Laurette."

Eleanor said, "We hoped that might have been the reason. Cluny, like you, I can't quite understand why after we'd asked Georgina to come here, she didn't tell us she was that Cluny's granddaughter. We'd have loved to know."

Mercifully Seth struck in. "I can explain. It was my fault. It was because of my crass behaviour at our first meeting. I won't explain it at length now, but a chap from the London office, who'd hoped to marry Georgina himself, offered me a lift down and on the way told me a pack of lies . . . that this girl never did anything without a mercenary motive. So I reacted in a way that stopped any confidences Georgina might have made a little later to you, dead in their tracks. In any case, at first she thought she must find out what Robert and Henry would think about it. She thought they were the owners. Aunts, you never knew, but we had a real clash when she answered the door to me. We managed to hide it, till after that lunch, and when we went out,

ostensibly to look at the places Rosamond MacQueen wanted me to photograph, we had another, gloves off, no holds barred. So she wasn't likely to reveal who she was. Then, as you know now, I fell in love with her, against my will."

James said, "I'm going to like my future son-in-law. No beating about the bush. I can understand my own daughter now."

Seth sketched a little bow, laughed. "You could have called me a fool, James. But I soon realized her worth. Looking back I feel we ought to have tumbled to it. At times she revealed scraps of knowledge that puzzled me. But I always thought it was with her research into the documents and diaries we had. And one thing I put down to sheer coincidence, though a charming one." Georgina looked puzzled. "What could that be?"

Seth continued, "We had always known, from the stories Laura handed down to Eleanor and Sarah, that Ellen had named the Echoing Cliff. She often sang to little Laura as they rambled along the shore. One day, to their surprise, her song came back beautifully clear in echo. They tried

out all the popular songs of the day then. Songs Ellen had learned in the Isle of Wight. Laura loved it because she'd hardly ever been in a theatre, except for the local concerts in Ludwigtown.

"Well, one day I spied Georgina wandering round there, picking up stones and skimming them across the water. I was beginning to fall for her and went to join her, but stopped dead when she came to that miniature headland, climbed it, looked towards the Echoing Cliff and began to sing. I couldn't believe it when I realized it was one of the songs the aunts' mother had recounted Ellen singing. Her music is still here in that piano stool. It was sheer magic to hear Georgina singing: 'I dreamt that I dwelt in marble halls . . .' from the Bohemian Girl. I felt it was history repeating itself." He looked across at Georgina and smiled. "It was then I knew it wasn't just infatuation but the real thing. I put it down to coincidence. I never dreamed, how could I? — that she was Ellen's great-granddaughter, that she too had grown up with those stories."

The big bluff man who was Georgina's father gave a delighted guffaw. He rubbed

his hands together. "This` is capital, capital! I'm getting myself a son-in-law who isn't afraid of sentiment. You'll do our family fine."

Georgina slipped an arm about her father's shoulders. "You great big softy! Our Dad, Seth, has always been known as The Sentimental Bloke, despite his tough exterior."

Georgina felt she must rescue Seth, before he revealed too much of all that had bedevilled them. She said, "But now all that matters is that Cluny is here, realizing her dearest dream. Let's show her upstairs."

Prue was shining-eyed. "All the rooms are ready. Georgina thought I was mad preparing them so far ahead when the twins weren't coming till New Year. Cluny, you're in Ellen's room."

They all followed. It was a touching moment when Cluny paused, a yard from the bed, saw the patchwork. She said, "To think it still exists, lovingly preserved." Her gaze swept round the room, taking in every detail. Then she said, "How fantastic . . . to actually see the room where my life began and . . ."

waving at the far wall, "to see my father in colour. We have only old black-and-white photos of him, very faded at that."

The effect on most of her listeners was electric. "*Your* father?" was the most distinguishable of the gasps that ensued.

Cluny looked bewildered, as did Georgina and her parents. Cluny said, with a sort of helpless mystified gesture with both hands. "*My* father? Why of course! Isn't that what all this is about — why I'm here? Why Georgina came?"

Seth came to first, stepped forward, held out his hands to her. "Cluny . . . we thought . . . we thought you were Pierre's daughter. Is it possible — ?"

Cluny said simply, "I am the daughter of George and Ellen Macpherson. It's on my birth certificate. Born nearly six months after she left here. My mother, I mean. I was born just after World War One broke out. Mother didn't even meet my stepfather till he came back from France, after the Armistice. George and Ellen had hoped for so long to have a child. They kept their knowledge to

themselves. They felt that in some way Hannah would rub the bloom off their joy. It's in Ellen's diaries and in the unfinished one of George's she took with her. When Hannah accused my mother of being the instrument of George's death when Ellen knew full well Hannah had asked him to get those rocks out of the way, she could not stay to risk having their child reared under the influence of a woman like that. Don't you realize Georgina not only inherited my father's name, she inherited his colouring, just as I did."

She looked across at her parents' pictures and the sun caught the remaining tinge of copper in her hair.

Seth turned to Georgina and kissed her, "Welcome to your true and proper sphere, my love." It was like a cue. Henry and Robert kissed their wives telling them they were giddy wonders to have triggered all this off. James hugged Louise, Prue crossed to Cluny, "What a wonderful time lies ahead," she said, "and what an ending to the history."

They began to inspect the other rooms. Seth kept Georgina back. He said, "I

think I've missed my cue somehow, somewhere. You seemed to think we knew you were George's descendant. How could you think that?"

She said, "I thought you had leapt to it that horrible day. You leapt to everything else. You said so . . . about Ellen being born in the eighties, when I'd said my great-grandmother was, Dorothy Charteris said it. About Ellen leaving here and taking on the trip back in *such a condition*. How didn't you tumble to it?"

"I took it as meaning she was in deep grief and shock. I knew you were descended from Ellen, that day, never dreamed it was from George too. Georgina, my love, I was too distraught that day to work it out. I was aghast to think I'd actually written to your father to not only ask was it possible for them to come here for Christmas as a delightful surprise to you, but had told him about my father."

Georgina said, "Seth, the initial fault was mine in not being open about the connection. I wanted to feel my way first. Then when that claimant case came on, I

just couldn't confess. You'd said it would be a disaster. It was foolish of me all round."

"You were wiser than you knew. My reactions could have been exactly on those lines had I known earlier. It all adds up now. Darling, this is going to be a big day for our extended family, filling in bits of history, a day of great joy. But somewhere at the end of it we are going to be alone, blessedly alone. It won't be where I took you last night, no more digging out greedy heifers in the midst of one of life's biggest moments!

"Now, my love, I'll bring the bags up and you can help your grandmother unpack. She's going to have a lengthy stay. If your father has to get back to the project he can come over again for the wedding. We'll have it at the Chapel-on-the-water at Campions. Won't they be thrilled? That family was in it from the start. I've been meaning to ask them if they have anything in their records about Ellen and George. Oh, I know I'm rushing on, but I've been in such uncertainty for so long since I sent that letter off to your father.

Sweetheart, we must catch them up. But what news it is that Ellen and George's great-granddaughter, with more claim to the estate than he has, will be marrying the owner of South Horizon!"

"That's the last time you are ever to say that, Seth Oliphant, and stop this headlong rush to get everything cut and dried. Three hours ago I wouldn't have dreamed my family would be here with me."

Seth freed her, said, "Now for this lunch my mama and the aunts have been secretly planning, only thinking of it as a surprise for you, at first. I stashed away champagne for dinner, for our engagement party, but in view of the fact that we're celebrating the return of George's daughter to her home, something I couldn't have dreamed of when I wrote your father care of an unknown Mrs C. Edwardes, we'll have it for lunch!"

At last the long, happy day was over. All sorts of endearing things had been revealed. Georgina had peeled back the WHEN WAS IT? book cover, to show them the inscription from William Somers

to his son-in-law, George Macpherson, had taken out the little sachet to compare it with the quilt. All the staff had been over to express their joy at this new wonderful relationship. Small Guy had sidled in, said to Georgina in a whisper, "Have you told him about the tiger?" She'd kissed him and said, "He laughed like mad, not a bit cross." Upon which Guy, recovering confidence quickly, said loudly and clearly, "Seth told me ages ago he had a good plan to keep Georgina here."

* * *

Now darkness had fallen. The children had sung their Christmas Eve carols beside the manger and were tucked up in their beds, blissfully expectant of bulging stockings when they would wake. Georgina and Seth had been told to go and wander by the lake by the happy company of older folk still gathered in the parlour.

Georgina was wearing the frock that was the same green as the one in Ellen's portrait. The Oliphant ring was on her

finger. The large star was still over the woolshed but Seth directed her steps along the lake-shore to the small headland opposite the Echoing Cliff. They crested it, looked across.

Seth said, "I'll never forget you singing '*I dreamt that I dwelt in marble halls*' here. I felt as if it couldn't be real, that it was just a coincidence. The next Sunday was the one we went across-lake to the service in Ludwigtown and the minister quoted a piece about coincidence. It said: '*A coincidence is only a small miracle where God chooses to remain anonymous.*' I felt it was a guiding light." He laughed. "I little knew how much misunderstanding was yet to come. But it was a beacon, that you, a seeming stranger, should come here and fill our lives with laughter, just as Ellen did for George."

They walked on, hand in hand, paused again at the exact spot on the headland where Ellen had found the finest echoes. Seth kissed her, seeking and finding the sort of rapture any man might dream of, a promise of greater raptures to come.

He said softly, "Like what you sang here said, Georgina . . .

'There may perhaps in such a scene
Some recollection be
Of days that have as happy been
And you'll remember me.'

"We'll always remember George and Ellen walking here in happiness, alone." He paused, said, "I've just thought of the wording on her gravestone . . . that her laughter would still echo in Heaven. Don't you think it's echoing now for us, back from the cliff she named, where once she sang for Laura and for George?"

THE END

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